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NAVIGATING INSTITUTIONAL RACISM THROUGH RUTGERS' SCHOOL OF ARTS
AND SCIENCES (SAS) EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FUND (EOF) PROGRAM

By

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Abstract

This study examined a U.S. based university's peer group for low-income students to identify the ways in which the group successfully retains African American, male students despite the low national retention rate of Black male students in higher education. The peer group was assessed through qualitative analysis to understand the ways in which the organization is able to facilitate students' academic and social integration into the university despite their experiences with institutional racism and microaggressions. Using Vincent Tinto's Theory (1975) and Critical Race Theory, this research finds that African American men are better able to retain within the university when the peer group's staff proactively addresses the challenges that the students bring with them into their university experience; facilitates the students' bond with racially similar, male students within the group; and adopts a "like family" approach towards academically and socially supporting students. It is suggested that similar university peer groups can mitigate the low retention of Black men through these efforts. There are several implications presented for research, practice, and policy, including the assumption that these groups can execute a stronger means of support for Black, male students through increased activities and funding.

Keywords: institutional racism, microaggressions, race, African American, persistence, retention, integration

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Chapter 1: Problem Statement and Research Questions

Introduction

It is often said that education is a gateway to success, yet a college degree remains just a dream for many Americans, particularly for African American men. Each year, only small numbers of African American men enter four-year universities in the United States. In 2004, the average enrollment for Black, male undergraduate students at any of the 50 public flagship universities was just 2.8% (Harper, 2006). Approximately 17.0% of Black men age 25 or older have completed a bachelor's degree or higher, which is lower than the 18.4% national average for all men age 25 or older (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). This enrollment gap is the result of several factors, particularly institutional racism, also known as "any institutional policy, practice, and structure that unfairly subordinates People of Color while allowing White persons to profit from such actions" (Sue, 2006, p. 24). Institutional racism against African Americans is often buried within standard operational procedures for everyone in the institution (D'Andrea & Daniels, 2007). For universities, institutional racism is historically found in discriminatory admission practices against Black people and the use of culturally-biased curriculum (Frierson, Pearson, & Wyche, 2009). The legacy of institutional racism is seen today in the underrepresentation of African American students on college campuses (D'Andrea & Daniels, 2007).

While a small number of Black men enter universities as undergraduates, the number of graduates is equally concerning. In 2009, the national graduation rate for Black males at four-

year institutions was 51%, while 73% of White males who entered these same institutions successfully obtained a college degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The gap in academic achievement goes beyond comparisons of Black males to White males attending colleges and universities. When comparing African American men to African American women, a gap in degree attainment is also found. By 2010, Black women made up 66% of all Black people completing a bachelor's degree, 71% of those completing a master's degree, and 65% of those completing a doctoral degree (Black Women in the United States, 2014). It is apparent that African American men not only lag behind White males when it comes to degree completion, but they are finishing college at a lesser rate than Black women.

The under representation and low degree attainment of Black men at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) is a problem echoed at Rutgers University—New Brunswick. Rutgers' goal is to foster a supportive and inclusive community for its approximately 35,500 undergraduate students (College Data, 2017; Rutgers University, 2015). However, only 7.4% of the population on the New Brunswick Campus identifies as African American and 764 out of 10,356 undergraduate men in Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) identified as African American and male (Rutgers University Registrar, 2016). Looking at Rutgers' graduation rates, it was found that only 5.5% of the total undergraduate degrees conferred to students at Rutgers University—New Brunswick students were given to African American men, while 47.3% of those degrees were awarded to White males (Rutgers University Fact Book, 2017). This is a much larger gap in degree attainment than the national average.

Researchers have found that Black men tend to drop-out of college due to institutional racism and experiences with microaggressions, “the everyday manifestations of racism that People of Color encounter in their public and private lives” (Huber & Solórzano, 2015, p.1). In the face of these oppressions, Black men lack the support systems needed to make them feel as if they belong at their educational institutions (Griffin, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Leppel, 2002). However, peer groups promote the social integration of students into the higher educational environment.

In his theory of social integration, Vincent Tinto suggests that students who academically and socially integrate into an academic environment will have a stronger commitment to remaining at that institution (Tinto, 1987). Peer interactions, he explains, create a sense of belonging within universities, thereby positively influencing students’ willingness to remain at their schools (Tinto, 1987). For African American students, participation in peer groups appears to play a significant role in their collegiate success because of the strong, positive correlation between peer membership within a racially similar and underrepresented group on campus and sense of belonging at their university (Einarson & Matier, 2005; Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Leppel, 2002). The establishment of peer groups works as an anti-racist strategy that is linked with student retention (Matier, 2005; Leppel, 2002).

Rutgers has established several diversity initiatives to help Black students to find comfort in their minority status and ultimately graduate from the university. One of the ways in which Rutgers is helping its African American students to academically and socially integrate into the

university's fabric and navigate institutional racism is through participation in the School of Arts and Sciences Educational Opportunity Fund (SAS EOF). Established in 2007 (following the establishment of Rutgers EOF in 1968), SAS EOF currently supports 1,300 academically talented, first-generation young adults who are economically and educationally disadvantaged (EOF Progress Report 2015; Rutgers University, 2016). SAS EOF provides academic and social support for students entering into Rutgers through its social networks. It has workshops, peer-to-peer mentoring services, counseling, and tutoring services to ease students' transition into and through college (EOF Scholars Guide and Checklist, 2016).

SAS EOF is more than just a financial aid program. SAS EOF serves as a hub for African American students who are seeking academic and social support from peers who share a similar ethnic and economic background. There are currently 1,205 total SAS EOF students, which is 88.6% or the majority of EOF students at Rutgers (Educational Opportunity Fund Program, 2017a). However, Black, Non-Hispanic men are underrepresented in SAS EOF. Approximately 550 (40.4%) of SAS EOF students are men, and only 92 (16.7%) of these men are African American. Approximately 287 (21.1%) SAS EOF students identify as Black, Non-Hispanic, but only 92 (6.7%) of that total population include Black men (Educational Opportunity Fund Program, 2017a).

Despite the small number of Black men in its program, it appeared that SAS EOF is successfully helping Black males to navigate institutional racism and to academically and socially integrate at Rutgers. New Jersey's 56 EOF programs, including SAS EOF, has a 55%

six-year graduation rate, which is higher than the graduation rate for low-income students at four-year public institutions across 15 states (EOF Progress Report 2015). Approximately 284 students made up the 2014 entering cohort for Rutgers SAS EOF, and 87% of those students are still enrolled in the program (Educational Opportunity Fund Program, 2017a). SAS EOF had a 99.3% six-year graduation rate which is higher in comparison to the 80% graduation rate of students at Rutgers University—New Brunswick (Educational Opportunity Fund Program, 2017a; Rutgers Fact Book, 2017).

While Rutgers' SAS EOF program is designed to submit annual reports on its progress, detailed evaluations of SAS EOF's ability to mediate the issue of Black males' retention in higher education are not widely available. Through this study, I gained a better understanding of how participation in Rutgers' SAS EOF helps African American men to academically and socially integrate into the university, while navigating institutional racism.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experience of social integration and academic achievement for African American men participating in Rutgers' School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program. Phenomenological research was utilized to "describe what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon ... [and to] reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2013, p. 58). This study focused on Black men's experiences in Rutgers SAS EOF program in order to fully evaluate the program's ability

to help Black men navigate institutional racism.

Research Questions

1. Does participation in SAS EOF help African American men to adjust academically and socially at Rutgers University and navigate institutional racism?
 - a. What are the issues and challenges that Black men bring with them into Rutgers that prevent them from integrating academically and socially and navigating institutional racism?
 - b. What issues and challenges do male, African American, EOF students face at Rutgers as minorities at a predominantly White institution (PWI)?
 - c. How do Rutgers SAS EOF students describe their use of the university's support systems? How do they perceive their relationship with the EOF staff?
 - d. Does Rutgers SAS EOF program help African American males to gain a sense of belonging at the university, and, if so, in which ways?
2. How do the counselors and other staff members' roles relate to the student experience?
 - a. Are there guiding principles and values that guide the program? If so, what are they?
 - b. How do counselors understand and define their role in relation to institutional racism?
3. What aspects of SAS EOF can be improved and why?
 - a. What are the observed limitations of the SAS EOF program?

- b. Which aspects of the program are related to students' persistence and retention?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

While this study focused on Black men's experiences in Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences Educational Opportunity Fund (SAS EOF) program in order to fully evaluate the program's ability to help Black men navigate institutional racism, we needed to look at the literature surrounding African American men's retention in higher education. When assessing African American men's college experiences and seeking explanations for student departure, it was apparent that we had to look beyond these men's academic performance. "While some students leave school because of academic dismissal, 'only 15 to 25 percent of all institutional departures arise because of academic failure'" (Tinto, 1993, pp. 81-82). There are factors, aside from one's studies, that help or hinder African American men from successfully adjusting at PWIs. To better explore this topic, we had to learn more about institutional racism and African American males' experiences in higher education.

This literature review will first focus on the relationship between slavery and institutional racism in higher education before highlighting the history of Rutgers University in relation to race and racism, including the university's relationship with the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF). I will then examine the research regarding the factors that shape Black males' social integration and abilities to persist in the presence of institutional racism. Final, I will describe the, research on African American men's experiences within peer groups, like SAS EOF. The studies included in this review span across both Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and historically Black universities and colleges (HSBUs) to better frame the African American male

college experience.

Master Scripting, Institutional Racism, and Higher Education

Researchers have found that the legacy of slavery fueled the present day racial inequality in education (Bertocchi, G. & Dimico, A., 2012, p. 592). White supremacy was used to subordinate People of Color and prevent them from obtaining an education, creating an “initial gap” between Black and White people. This “master script” presented itself in the form of institutional racism in higher education (Knowles & Prewitt, 1969). It has kept Black men from entering American universities and college, while also discouraging them from remaining within these institutions.

The master script and retention. Some scholars have found a link between the history of slavery in the U.S. and the inequalities found in higher education. It is found that the “use of slavery in the historical past may be an important determinant of the levels of inequality observed today across the globe” (Soares, R.R., Assunção, J.J., & Goulart, T.F., 2012). According to a study by Lagerlöf (2005), the presence of a high number of slaves in the U.S. in 1850 is related to the higher income gaps between Black and White people today. According to these researchers, slavery produced the unequal socioeconomic outcomes in our present day society, which programs like SAS EOF works to overcome. However, other researchers have found that slavery is the “initial gap” that has determined the differences in attainment between Black and White people (Bertocchi, G. & Dimico, A., 2012). These researchers believed that “the legacy of slavery still looms over American society ... and racial inequality in education is

indeed affected by slavery” (Bertocchi, G. & Dimico, A., 2012, p. 592). This initial gap is a contributing factor in the small amount of Black men in higher educational institutions, like Rutgers.

It is believed that higher education is a key for social mobility in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). However, some researchers question the role of education and view it through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT, a product of the critical legal studies movement that adds race to the movement’s dialogue (Cerezo, McWhirter, Peña, Valdez, & Bustos, 2013). CRT gives insight into the African American experience by examining race, gender, and class discrimination (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Tierney, 1993). “Critical Race Theory sees the official school curriculum as a culturally-specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 18). This master scripting has resulted in an official school curriculum that is culturally-specific and includes the removal of African Americans stories whenever they challenge the White supremacist master script (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In other words, there is a hidden curriculum in education that does not include or reflect African Americans. According to these studies, higher education is designed with a “master script” based on White supremacy and has created a historic “initial gap,” fueling racially unequal socioeconomic outcomes that may negatively influence Black men’s abilities to obtain a college degree.

Institutional racism at predominantly white institutions. According to the literature, education’s master scripting is also related to institutional racism. As we know, institutional

racism unfairly subordinates People of Color through structural inequality. Institutional racism can be viewed as unintentional, colorblind, or disguised in history or ideology (Knowles & Prewitt, 1969). We also know that most types of institutional racism are disguised as standard operating procedures (SOPS) for an organization (D'Andrea & Daniels, 2007).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) presents a different view on institutional racism. This theory recognizes the presence of policies and practices that maintain systems of inequality, including higher education's adherence to color-blind approaches (Cerezo et al., 2013). When applying the critical race theoretical framework to higher education, it is apparent that colleges and universities perpetuate historically racist policies and practices. In fact, the leading academic institutions, including Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, have systematically restricted African Americans from entering these colleges while perpetuating racist narratives (Wilder, 2013). CRT also acknowledges that the United States' history of White supremacy continues to shape the African American experience within higher education, as seen by the low Black student population across U.S. colleges (Patton, 2015).

Hall and Rowan's (2001) qualitative study is exemplary of these findings. Through six focus groups, each containing up to 12 African American college students, the researchers discovered that "the racism and problems faced by African American males in institutions of higher education continue to extend from matters of race and discrimination because racism unfortunately is sustained by deep-rooted cultural norms" (Hall & Rowan, 2001, p. 12). The

universities themselves may work to perpetuate unequal schooling due to a lack of diversity amongst its population. This can discourage students from attending institutions where they are not represented (Cabrera & Nora, 1994). Furthermore, Black students will struggle to remain at schools that have a negative racial climate (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Solorzano, et al., 2000).

Rutgers and Institutional Racism

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey is among the American colleges that has ties to the enslavement of Black people (Fuentes & White). Rutgers historically constructed and maintained racial ideology that prevented Black men from entering the university. Once the university opened its doors to Black men, it continued to challenge their academic and social integration by not recognizing and acknowledging them as equal to White students. Rutgers' history of institutional racism was evident by the presence of student unrest within the university.

Rutgers' deep ties to enslaved and disenfranchised populations. To understand the present-day student experience of African American men within Rutgers' SAS EOF program, it is important to understand Rutgers relationship with institutional racism. Historically, Rutgers has been negatively tied to enslaved and disenfranchised populations. "The leaders of Queen's College owned enslaved people ... When Rutgers' founding fathers died, they bequeathed their slaves to their wives, daughters, sons, and grandchildren" (Fuentes & White, 2016, p.82). There was a cycle of passing on enslaved Black people down through the generations of the university's founding families. These leaders included Theodore Frelinghuysen, a believer in separate and distinct races; Philip Livingston, founder of Queen's College; and Jacob

Hardenbergh, the first president of the college (Fuentes & White, 2016). The early university leaders believed in “master scripting” and the continuation of the “initial gap” between Black and White people, as was created by slavery. “Like most early American colleges, Rutgers depended on slaves to build its campuses and serve its students and faculty; it depended on the sale of Black people to fund its very existence” (Fuentes & White, 2016, p.1). Slavery was a part of Rutgers’ economic survival. This embedded institutional racism within Rutgers.

With a history rooted in the enslavement of Black people, Rutgers did not accept African American students during its early years. These actions can be described by William H. Watkins’ coined term, “White architects of black education,” which captures the purpose of institutional racism within America’s higher education. This constructed tool was a way to control the racial power dynamics within society. According to Watkins, White people “used their power and capital to build an educational system with the normalized mask of whiteness, moralized contraption, and ladder altruism, an educational system that taught African Americans their rightful place, an educational system that buttressed the exploitation of black labor, an educational system for control” (Rogers, 2012, p. 17). Higher educational institutions, including Rutgers, were created to reinforce the inequities brought about by the racial construction of society. Rutgers’ admission practices and lack of diversity in its early years reaffirmed the use of “master scripting” and institutional racism. It can be argued that this long lasting effect is now seen at Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences (SAS), where only 7.4% of the population identifies as African American and 764 out of 10,356 undergraduate men in SAS identified as African

American and male (Rutgers University Registrar, 2016).

Rutgers and racial ideology. Rutgers, like other early American colleges and universities, became a space to construct and maintain racial ideology. These institutions had a clear role of historically reaffirming perceived differences between Black and White people. “Those with an interest in using race difference to solidify positions of power looked to the academy as a site where their questions could be answered. College faculty, specifically scientists and theologians, came to be responsible for sitting through and refining all this knowledge, and coming to definitive conclusions about racial difference” (Fuentes & White, 2016, p.146). The institution itself was not only setup to keep Black people outside of its gates, but also college educators and researchers used their positions as thought leaders and credible sources of information to further ignite the longevity of institutional racism.

African American men have made attempts throughout the years to socially and academically integrate into U.S. universities. It is apparent that “more Black students graduated from college between 1926 and 1936 than in the nation’s previous years combined” (Rogers, 2012, p. 21). The universities slowly opened their doors to Black men. “Fueled by a forward-looking temperament, they [Black men] applied in droves to segregated schools from the late 1930s to the 1960s,” (Rogers, 2012, p.55). However, Black students have been historically treated as if they were invisible once they got over the initial hurdle of acceptance and actually entered the university. In 1919, Black students at the University of Pennsylvania (UPENN) were restricted from eating in the cafeteria with White students at the university and were told to eat

their lunch separated from the group, under a set of stairs (Rogers, 2012). At Harvard, one Black male recalled never being called upon by his professor (Rogers, 2012). Both incidences are just a few examples of how Black men have been historically treated as if they did not belong within universities.

Rutgers' history also includes the unequal treatment of Black male students that sparked student unrest. The black campus movement across U.S. universities between 1965 and 1972, a response by African American students in demand for greater inclusion in their university experience, also manifested at Rutgers. An example of this is seen in 1969 when 50 Black male students along with Black female students dumped their food on the floors of Rutgers dining halls in protest of their treatment by the university (Rogers, 2012). The students also vandalized the university's property to call attention to their need for recognition and inclusion, while pushing against the university's racial ideology (Rogers, 2012). As researchers noted, "acknowledging the university's deep ties to slavery requires stating and accepting that Rutgers has not been 'revolutionary for 250 years' in the eyes of enslaved and disenfranchised people in Rutgers' history, or their descendants" (Fuentes & White, 2016, p.57). Rutgers' history of institutional racism has shaped Black, male students' experiences at the university.

Rutgers' History and School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF)

The African American population's historic socioeconomic disadvantage led to social unrest, including racial riots in Newark, NJ during the summer of 1967. Rutgers' Educational

Opportunity Fund (EOF) was established in 1968 in response to these riots and the Civil Rights era. Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences Educational Opportunity Fund (SAS EOF) was later established in June 2007 when the university consolidated its New Brunswick liberal arts colleges. Although Rutgers SAS EOF was introduced to increase access to the university, Rutgers' institutional racism continued to shape Black, male students' social and academic integration within the university.

Civil disorders, rights, and Rutgers' EOF program. Rutgers' legacy of institutional racism means that African American men are entering spaces that are not historically set up for them to enter and retain. Under the pressure of Black activists, in 1963, Rutgers introduced programs to recruit a small amount of Black students (Rogers, 2012, p. 27). The university was once again pressured to further open its doors and provide greater access to the African American population, through the establishment of the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program.

Rutgers' EOF program was historically put into place in response to the social unrest of the Civil Rights era, riots that took place in Newark during the summer of 1967, and a need for equity and access to the university. In the aftermath of World War II, approximately 100,000 Black people migrated from the South to Newark in hopes of gaining employment opportunities (Coleman, 2017; Hartman & Lewis, 2002). The Great Migration of Black people entered what was once "home to a burgeoning and upwardly mobile European immigrant population" (Coleman, 2017, p.3). However, they entered spaces in which the White population, along with

their jobs, were no longer present (Coleman, 2017). This added to the African American population's economic disadvantage, which was coupled by the fact that the housing segregation of that time forced African Americans into the city's ghettos (Coleman, 2017; Hartman & Lewis, 2002). African Americans in "the Central Ward faced unemployment, underemployment, poor housing, infant mortality, substandard schools, high crime rates, a lack of political power, and daily harassment from a local majority-White police force" (Coleman, 2017, p. 1).

This social unrest, large concentration of Black people in poor areas, and need for civil rights sparked the racial riots that took place during the summer of 1967 in more than 125 cities (Coleman, 2017). Police brutality against a cab driver led to violent protests that took place in Newark from July 12-17, 1967 (Hartman & Lewis, 2002). As a result, Newark, New Jersey, became the epicenter of these racial riots (Coleman, 2017). The governing bodies had to pay attention and respond to the unrest.

In November 1967, following the summer riots, New Jersey Chancellor of Higher Education Ralph Dungan sent a memorandum to all New Jersey university presidents proposing special assistance to economically and educationally disadvantaged students seeking a college education (Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, 2013). Following Duncan's letter and in response to the riots, former New Jersey Governor Richard Hughes, along with his Select Commission on Civil Disorders, the Lilly Commission, issued "The Lilly Commission Report" in February 1968 (Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, 2013). The report recognized the many issues that were affecting the Black community and led to the riots.

Hughes went on to deliver his “Moral Recommitment” message to the New Jersey State Legislature on April 25, 1968 (Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, 2013) to further address the state’s issues with race relations. “This message contained a broad range of programs designed to change or ameliorate some of the basic social causes which The Lilly Commission cited as contributing to the Newark riots. Included in Governor Hughes’ message was the creation of a program entitled the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) established by legislation, sponsored by then freshman legislator Thomas Kean.” (Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, 2013, p.1). The Educational Opportunity Fund was enacted into law on July 12, 1968, with \$2 million given to direct student aid and support programs (McMillan-Lonesome, 2018).

SAS EOF and African American men. Rutgers adopted the EOF program in 1968 in response to the Newark riots and its legacy of institutional racism. The SAS EOF program “was established in June 2007 when the Rutgers-New Brunswick liberal arts colleges’ EOF Programs (Douglass College, Livingston College, Rutgers College, and University College) were consolidated” (Rutgers Student Access and Educational Equity, 2015, p.1). The program assists first-generation students with the access and opportunity to gain a Rutgers education, based on their academic and financial need (Rutgers Student Access and Educational Equity, 2015). The students have guidelines to maintain their eligibility in the program. “These include successful completion of the Summer Institute, maintaining an on-going active relationship with their assigned counselor, and participation in academic support efforts, such as, tutoring, creating an

academic plan, interpersonal skills-building activities, workshops, educational enrichment activities, and career exploration” (Rutgers Student Access and Educational Equity, 2015, p.1). In addition to these requirements, the students receive additional services. “Supportive services would be provided including special classes ... reduced course load, extra class sessions in regular courses, and extensive counseling services. Colleges and universities would provide the support and enthusiasm for EOF to be a success and assume responsibility for providing access to EOF students” (McMillan-Lonesome, 2018, p.2).

We know that SAS EOF provides financial assistance to all low-income, first-generation students seeking a higher education (Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, 2013 & Rutgers University, 2018). We also know that African American men are counted among this group of students who are able to enter Rutgers through the SAS EOF program. However, there is also a high retention rate of Black men within the SAS EOF program, as opposed to the nationwide retention rate of Black men at universities.

African American men continue to enter universities, including Rutgers, with a unique set of challenges. Fuentes and White note that, “Not unlike the black student movement of the late 1960s, students of color today are drawing from theories of liberation to push their universities to extend them the same sense of belonging that White students have had since the founding of higher education in the North American colonies and later the United States” (2016, p.160). In recent years, African American students at Rutgers have confronted the university’s racist past. During Rutgers’ 250th anniversary in 2016, students approached the administration and said,

“We are celebrating the 250th anniversary, but we are really not talking about Rutgers’ involvement in slave trading and dispossessing Native Americans from their land” (Wood, 2018, p.1). The university responded to students’ complaints by renaming its walkways, a library, and even incorporating African American history into its campus tours (Doerer, 2018). Although these are recent efforts by the university to address its history, it is apparent that Rutgers carries the legacy of institutional racism. We still need to know how SAS EOF men are able to retain at Rutgers and navigate institutional racism.

This study will explore the experiences of SAS EOF, African American male students to uncover what SAS EOF is doing successfully for its Black male students as well as the program’s limitations. To learn more about the present-day experiences of African American men in college, we need to once again turn to the literature to see if there are other factors that appear to shape African American male students’ integration.

Factors Shaping African American Males’ Social Integration

Researchers have found that racism continues in society and has evolved into microaggressions, also known as subtle racist cues, against African Americans (Sue et al., 2008). Microaggressions are also found to be symptoms of institutional racism—the larger structural problems that have historically marginalized and excluded people of color” (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015, p.2). Several scholars have proven that African American male, university students’ experience with microaggressions and White supremacy negatively shapes their self-perception and works against their retention. These issues include Black, male students’

“spokesperson pressure,” stereotype threat, and fears of “acting White.”

Microaggressions against black, male students. For Black Americans, racism is still an ongoing experience and reality in their lives; however, racism is not solely experienced through intentional and explicit actions (Sue et al., 2008). Instead these experiences often include insensitive responses and actions through subtle cues, i.e. microaggressions. These microaggressions can be categorized include two, central types: microinsults, which are snubs against a person’s race or heritage such as ignoring a person of color’s contributions or questioning their qualifications, and microinvalidations, which are actions that exclude a person of color’s actual reality such as complimenting that person for speaking English well or the expression of being color-blind (Sue et al., 2007). Microinsults and microinvalidations may not be intended to insult the person it is targeting, yet they succeed in doing so.

These forms of microaggressions “reflect an invisible worldview of White supremacy” (Sue et al., 2008, p. 337) and can lead to psychological distress in Black Americans (Sue et al., 2008). Sue et al. (2008) have found several themes within microaggressions. They include: assumptions of intellectual inferiority, such as when someone remarks that a person’s comment was surprisingly smart; assumptions of second-class citizenship; assumptions of criminality; assumption of another person’s inferior status at work or being uncultured; the assumed universality of the Black American experience; the assumed superiority of White cultural values and communication styles; and beliefs in color-blindness (Sue et al., 2008). Researchers have also found that racial microaggressions “may be more harmful to People of Color than overt acts

of racial hatred and bigotry because the hidden, unintentional nature of microaggressions allows them to flourish outside the level of conscious awareness of the perpetrators, thereby infecting interracial interactions, institutional procedures and practices, and social policies” (Sue et al., 2008, p. 331).

While Sue et al. (2008) identified the general presence of microaggressions in society, other investigators have taken a more in-depth exploration of microaggressions’ presence in education. They’ve found that students who experience microaggressions feel invisible in the classroom and overlooked by their professors and peers (Solorzano, et al., 2000). In fact, Black males who experience microaggressions believe that faculty has lower expectations of them because of their race, causing self-doubt and discouragement (Solorzano, et al., 2000). They also tend to avoid faculty members outside of the classroom because of these negative encounters (Allen, 1992; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999).

Additional investigators support this finding and highlight the internal struggles faced by Black male, students who experience microaggressions. Black males who have experienced microaggressions view these experiences as sources of stress and “racial battle fatigue” (Smith et al., 2011). These students have expressed feeling “drained” by the negative assumptions of their academic ability and discomfort in campus spaces (Solorzano, et al., 2000). It is apparent that covert or overt forms of racism negatively affect students’ motivation to learn.

Institutional racism at predominantly white institutions. Other studies draw

connections between microaggressions and institutional racism. These researchers believe that racial microaggressions are important to assess because “they are symptoms of institutional racism—the larger structural problems that have historically marginalized and excluded people of color” (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015, p.2). They argue that racial microaggressions can “work as a powerful ‘tool’ for identifying, disrupting, and dismantling the racism that marginalizes, subordinates and excludes People of Color in and outside of education” (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015, p. 2). This argument is particularly salient because it works against present-day claims that we are living in a “post-racial” society, a society that does not perpetuate historically racist relations (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015).

Self-perception and social integration. Several scholars have taken an internal approach to the issue of Black men’s retention in higher education. This includes Steele (1997); Ogbu & Simon (1998); Solorzano (2000); Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso (2000); Harper (2006); Warikoo & Carter (2009); Dancy (2011); and Carter (2013). They found that Black men’s self-perception is correlated with student success, i.e. their abilities to earn a college degree (Solorzano, 2000; Solorzano, et al., 2000; Dancy, 2011). Quantitative studies show that some Black men in college face a double conscious identity that affects their ability to persist through college. It’s found that Black men tend to wrestle with their identity as the American citizen versus that of an oppressed person of African descent and refrain from cultural behaviors that may be questioned by White students at PWIs (Dancy, 2011). According to one researcher, Black, male students find themselves being unclear about their identity and the appropriateness

of their actions since PWIs typically deem appropriate behaviors as those that are based on a historically White supremacist ideal (Dancy, 2011).

These attitudes are supported by a qualitative, focus-group designed study to assess 34 African American students' experience of the racial climate at three elite PWIs (Solorzano, 2000). The students in the study noted that they did not want to be judged for acting in ways that will fulfill stereotypes of Black people (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Without the comfort of acting as they truly are, some Black students battled a dual identity, which is correlated with persistence (Solorzano, et al., 2000). They feel a "spokesperson pressure" that is "tiring," even causing one student to find it harder "to participate and get involved and get interested." (Solorzano, et al., 2000).

Self-perception and social integration is also affected by stereotype threat, "a situational threat that can affect members of any group about whom a negative stereotype exists ... members of these groups can fear being reduced to that stereotype" (Steele, 1997, p. 614). For African Americans, negative stereotypes about their academic abilities hamper their academic achievement" (Steele, 1997). Research also shows that "sustained school achievement depends, most centrally, on identifying with school" (Steele, 1997, p. 615). According to this study, Black men's achievements in higher education would depend on their identification with their university. However, if there is stereotype threat, this would negatively impact persistence. "How threatening this recognition becomes depends on the person's identification with the

stereotype-relevant domain. ... In the short run can depress their intellectual performance and, over the long run, undermine the identity itself” (Steele, 1997, p. 617). According to these findings, stereotype threats on Black men can result in an immediate decrease in their academic performance and negatively impact their identity in the long run.

Black, male students’ self-perception and social integration in higher education may also be based on their affiliation within differing minority categories (Ogbu & Simon, 1998). These categories include involuntary or voluntary minorities (Ogbu & Simon, 1998). “The different categories call attention to ... (1) the nature of White American involvement with their becoming minorities and (2) the reasons they came or were brought to the United States” (Ogbu & Simon, 1998, p. 164). Voluntary (immigrant) minorities are identified as people who voluntarily chose to move to the U.S. to achieve a better lifestyle, while involuntary (nonimmigrant) minorities have forcibly come to the U.S. through slavery or colonization by White people (Ogbu & Simon, 1998). The U.S. is permanently marked by discrimination, according to involuntary minorities, while voluntary minorities view higher education as a means to economic advancement (Ogbu & Simon, 1998). These two, differing approaches are considerations for analysis of Black men’s self-perception and integration into college.

Where Ogbu & Simon (1998) raise issues related to Black men’s minority status, Warikoo & Carter (2009) believe that Black students are unable to integrate socially within schools because they are proactively abstaining from “acting White.” This attitude is rooted in

the ethnic stratification of minorities and differing attitudes towards educational outcomes (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). Through this lens, “the internalized oppression compels African Americans to criticize, attack, or have unrealistic expectations of those [African Americans] who willingly step forward to assume leadership responsibilities” (Harper, 2006, p.338). It is believed that African Americans will distance themselves and mistreat other African Americans who take on leadership roles, thereby “acting White.” It is also believed that African Americans who are involuntary minorities will actively resist assimilation in the U.S., including education, because it is shaped by predominantly White viewpoints and experiences. This internalized racism and resistance makes these same minorities avoid the higher educational experience for fear of “acting White” (Dancy, 2011).

Other researchers critique this perspective, stressing that educational institutions play a role in Black students’ experiences because of its unequal treatment of these students compared to White students. “It is the unequal treatment of various student cultures in mainstream schooling that fuels the opportunity gap” (Carter, 2013, p. 143). It was also found that differences in cultural markers, or shared meaning, have serious consequences. “U.S. schools fail to provide their schoolchildren with multiple lenses or perspectives through which to view education and society” (Carter, 2013, p. 150). A diversity of ethnic and cultural perspectives is missing in education. This leads to a cultural mismatch between Black students and the structured school practices that serve to reproduce the predominantly White experience that’s embedded in educational institutions (Carter, 2013).

Furthermore, Black students' perception of unfitness appears to change when more Black people are represented in higher education. Empirical research shows that when peers of the same racial group see themselves represented in high-track classes, this representation enhances students' performance (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). This research assumes that Black youths who witness academic achievers of the same race will not label these students as "acting White." Instead, they will become motivated towards their own academic achievement (Warikoo & Carter, 2009).

Navigating Institutional Racism Through Peer Groups

Scholars have found that when African American students become members of a peer group, they are more integrated into an institution and more likely to persist through degree completion (Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Students' satisfaction and sense of belonging within a university or college are shown as key components of persistence. Other studies highlight that fictive kin, otherwise known as "like family" relationships, create special ties for African Americans that help them to overcome challenges (Allen et al., 2011. p.1167). It is assumed that fictive kin may be present in peer relations and is related to persistence. Research also shows that comprehensive retention programs that include a combination of academic, cultural, and social supports are most helpful for minority students (Johnson, 2013; Person & LeNoir, 1997). These types of peer groups appear to give African American students a greater satisfaction and a sense of belonging that improves their chances of

retaining within higher education.

Peer group membership and sense of belonging. While research indicates that higher education plays a role in closing and opening the opportunity gap through racial representation, other scholars have explored African American, undergraduate students' psychological sense of belonging in relation to peer group membership. Using logit analysis and national-level data from a survey of 2,647 men and 2,737 women, Leppel found that "the more a student's experiences integrate socially and intellectually into the life of the institution through their peers, the more likely that he or she will persist until degree completion" (2002, p. 434). Supportive relationships appear to aid in social adjustments and the sense of belonging to one's educational institution.

According to Vincent Tinto's (1975) theory on student retention, the more peer interactions and academic supports a student has within an institution, the more likely that student will persist to degree completion. Tinto (1998, p. 168) noted that "one thing we know about persistence is that involvement matters." Persistence is greater in students who are more integrated in the college experience through university programs that facilitate peer relations. Tinto's (1998) model and CRT underline the assumptions seen in this study's logic model, which is captured in Figure 1. It is assumed that when Rutgers' African American, undergraduate men become members of peer groups, such as the School of Arts and Sciences Educational Opportunity Fund (SAS EOF), and participate in SAS EOF's activities, their satisfaction and

sense of belonging within Rutgers improves. This can allow Black male students to retain at the university through the academic years.

For African American students, participation in peer groups plays a significant role in their collegiate success because peer membership is positively correlated with a sense of belonging (Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007). “In addition to being internally driven, Black students appear to employ motivation strategies that originate from external influences to both maintain their self-esteem and motivate them to achieve” (Griffin, 2006, p. 387). Black students’ participation in ethnic organizations, religious groups, and student government bridges the gap between their home and classroom connections in PWIs (Guiffrida, 2003; Pascarella, 1985).

Black students’ peer membership has historically aided in their retention at colleges and universities. When they were increasingly admitted into some colleges and universities during the early twentieth century, peer membership helped Black students to persist through higher education. “The stifling sense of isolation and segregation at Historically White Universities and Colleges (HWUCs) and the moralized contraption at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) contributed to a low retention rate, as it would for decades” (Rogers, 2012, p.19). The retention of Black students has been historically challenged. “It was the sunrise of Black student organizing—not to change the racial constitution, but to endure it” (Rogers, 2012, p.19). Black students united in an effort to navigate the discrimination they experienced while attending these institutions, educational spaces that traditionally embraced and

reaffirmed a White supremacy.

The positive effects of African American students' peer relations are supported by an investigation conducted at a large, predominantly White, mid-Atlantic university (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). Approximately 245 first-year, African American students were studied to explore the relationship between sense of belonging with student persistence. The researchers found that sense of belonging and institutional commitment were significant predictors of student persistence (Hausmann, et al., 2007). "A student's interaction with others is important for his or her persistence in college, not simply or primarily because it leads to the sharing of general values and orientations, but because it assists the student in developing specific strategies for negotiating the physical, social, and cognitive academic geographies" (Attinasi, 1989, p. 267). The dynamic amongst peers appears to help Black students navigate their institution.

Satisfaction and sense of belonging. Several scholars have taken a different approach when exploring Black men's retention at universities. They have added satisfaction as an important element in student retention, finding that Black men's satisfaction and sense of belonging within their institution are correlated with student success, i.e. Black males' abilities to earn a college degree. Scholars utilize the word "satisfaction" to capture a student's ability to think positively about their college and organically promote their schools to prospective students (Astin, 1993).

In a survey of 11,606 White, Asian, Latino, and African American seniors at 17 universities across the country, linear regression and decision tree analysis was used to find that African American seniors are less satisfied with their campus diversity and reported achieving lower grades when compared to other racial groups (Einarson & Matier, 2005). “For seniors of all race groups, satisfaction with social involvement was the social integration measure with the strongest relationship to overall satisfaction” (Einarson & Matier, 2005, p. 656). Students who participate in school activities are more likely to be satisfied with their education institution (Strayhorn, 2008). This strong, positive relationship between satisfaction and social integration is apparent among all racial groups and is linked to retention (Einarson & Matier, 2005; Leppel, 2002).

In addition to the relationship between satisfaction and sense of belonging, there is further interplay between satisfaction and social integration. In a quantitative investigation of 231 African American, undergraduate men who completed the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ), descriptive statistics were used to analyze the link between “supportive relationships” and Black males’ success in college (Strayhorn, 2008). The study found that African American males who reported frequent, positive relationships with peers and faculty on campus were more satisfied with their college experience (Strayhorn, 2008). Satisfaction was assumed to be correlated with, not directly related to, student retention. Although the relationship between satisfaction and academic achievement was not addressed, this study highlights Black, male students’ need for personal supports as explained by Tinto’s theory of

retention (Strayhorn, 2008).

Sense of belonging and fictive kin. Carol Stack (1974) coined the term “fictive kin,” to describe another form of meaningful relationship for students. Stack studied how poor Black families survive day to day through an exchange of goods and services (1974). She claims that their daily survival is often dependent on close relationships with individuals who aren’t necessarily blood relatives (Stack, 1974). These relations are “ ‘like’ mother, father, brother, or sister” (Whitney, 2016, p. 15). Other researchers view fictive kin as “pretend relatives” who step into family-related roles (Allen, Blieszner, & Roberto, 2011). According to these researchers, friends, students, or work colleagues who are nonkin can become a fictive kin, someone of close relation. (Allen et al., 2011. p.1167). “Fictive kin serve a purpose or meet a need, whether affective or instrumental” (Allen et al., 2011, p.1159). The person can fulfill the supportive family role that is missing.

Fictive kin relations may be present among peer groups, since these supportive relationships are historically found in the African American community. “Fictive kin relationships have been formed as modes of survival for many African Americans in the United States since slavery” (Whitney, 2016, p. 29). These special ties have formed because relational gaps took place or due to extraneous circumstances, such as the death of a loved one (Whitney, 2016). These studies have also shown that African American, low-income, and first-generation students who aspire to attend college are aided in their college admissions and aspirations by

fictive kin, people who are “like family” and not biologically related (Whitney, 2016). These relationships serve as networks of support by people who can help grant them culturally and social capital.

Programming that enhances socialization. While Whitney (2016) highlighted how fictive kin helps African Americans with their goal of attending college, other studies have found that peer groups can help African American students within higher education space, not just prior to college admission. Knowing that academic and social integration influences the probability of persistence, universities can enhance African American students’ overall satisfaction and sense of belonging through programs geared towards student involvement (Einarson & Matier, 2005; Spady, 1971). Research shows that comprehensive retention programs consisting of a combination of academic, cultural, and social supports are most helpful for minority students (Johnson, 2013; Person & LeNoir, 1997).

An example of this seen in Johnson (2013)’s qualitative study of a comprehensive retention program at a PWI and its impact on African American students’ matriculation. Six students and four retention program directors and/or deans were interviewed for the study, and results revealed that students in the program increased their socialization with faculty, program staff, and other students. The mentoring program components helped to make the students positively aware of their culture. They expressed feelings of empowerment and pride in being African American.

Similar results were found when assessing the relationship between comprehensive support programs and 31 African American male, student-athletes from 11 institutions (Person & LeNoir, 1997). Approximately 71% of the students actively engaged in advising programs such as mentorships and peer counseling, and 45% participated in career seminar activities. It was discovered that “African American males who attend predominantly White institutions often feel alienated, and increasing the number of mentoring programs with college faculty and staff can potentially increase African American men’s retention rates” (Grant-Thompson & Atkinson, 1997). It is mentors’ culturally responsiveness, as opposed to color-blindness, that appear to resonate with African American mentees (Dappen & Iserhagen, 2005). In general, these student athletes were more likely to retain when participating in a supportive program, and they were more likely to persist when the support activities, including advising and career seminars, were viewed as effective (Person & LeNoir, 1997).

Programming is also found to be effective when introduced to students prior to their entry into college. Researchers note that early intervention programs have proven to assist in the retention of African American students at predominantly White institutions (Johnson, 2013; McGlynn, 2008). Florida State University's (FSU) introduction of the Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement (CARE) in 2000 is exemplary of the ways in which early intervention programs can assist Black students’ retention. CARE introduced students to FSU’s campus and community before the start of the academic year, and it helped them learn to navigate the pathways towards academic success (McGlynn, 2008). This proved to be

successful. In 2006, FSU eliminated the gap between Black and White students, graduating Black students at a historic rate and giving credit to the introduction of CARE (McGlynn, 2008).

Conclusion

The existing literature is helpful in understanding how Black students are excluded from the category of membership in higher education through the presence of institutional racism and microaggressions (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Solorzano, et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2007;). It also highlighted Rutgers' history of institutional racism and its negative effect on Black, male students' sense of belonging. It explains why Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences Educational Opportunity Fund (SAS EOF) program had to be created in order to provide more access and equity to students, including Black men.

These studies also cast a light on the internal issues that Black students face when studying at a PWI with a negative racial climate (Smith et al., 2011; Warikoo & Carter, 2009). Black, male students' self perception and sense of belonging may be shaped by stereotype threats and "spokesperson pressures" (Solorzano, et al., 2000; Steele, 1997). Their identities as involuntary or voluntary minorities and/or their efforts to not "act White" may drive them to not persist through college completion (Ogbu & Simon, 1998; Warikoo & Carter, 2009).

From the extant research, universities can help Black students to integrate into their school's fabric by fostering early intervention programs and peer groups, like SAS EOF (Einarson & Matier, 2005; Leppel, 2002; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1998). Student participation in

peer groups allow them to obtain satisfaction and a sense of belonging, gain preparatory skills, and socially integrate into their institution, thereby fueling their academic progression (Johnson, 2013; McGlynn, 2008). Within these peer groups, the presence of “fictive kin” or “like family” relations may also work as a mode of academic survival (Whitney, 2016).

Despite laying the landscape for exploring Black males’ student retention and Rutgers history in relation to retention, the research overlooks an in-depth analysis of how peer groups, specifically EOF programs, are succeeding in helping Black males to graduate from universities. Current research incorporates some student feedback on their experiences as a peer group member, but there is room for continued exploration of students’ views on EOF and its efforts to prepare them for entry into and life within college. We know that Rutgers SAS EOF is successful in its efforts, but additional research is needed to see if and how the activities and mentorship provided through SAS EOF is helping Black men to address experiences with microaggressions and institutional racism.

There is still room in the literature to understand and identify the aspects of Rutgers SAS EOF program that resonate with Black men and possibly encourage their self-perception and sense of belonging at universities. In addition, we need to assess the issues and challenges African American men face at Rutgers today, how SAS EOF fosters integration into Rutgers’ campus community, how Rutgers SAS EOF students describe their use of the university’s support systems, and their perceived limitations of the program. This study seeks to add the successes of the EOF program to the literature and explore the ways in which participation in

SAS EOF helps African American men to adjust socially at the university and navigate institutional racism.

Theoretical Lens

There are several theories on student retention and persistence. This study drew on researcher Vincent Tinto's (1975) theory of student retention along with critical race theory (CRT) to examine the issue of student retention in higher education. According to Tinto, students who report having more participation in peer-groups and faculty interactions also report a greater sense of belonging within their institution (Tinto, 1998). Tinto identifies four factors associated with student departure, including academic preparedness, goal commitment, integration into the institution's intellectual and social environment, and economic status. I used Tinto (1998)'s theory to recognize that there are potentially four factors associated with SAS EOF students' departure from Rutgers. SAS EOF students may have been struggling with their academic preparedness, goal commitment, ability to fit within the university environment, and economic issues, particularly since there is a financial eligibility criteria for participation in the program. In addition, I used Tinto's theory to frame whether Black men have a greater sense of belonging at Rutgers due to their participation in peer groups. Tinto's theory guided the overall analysis of African American, male students' abilities to successfully integrate into Rutgers through SAS EOF.

Critical Race Theory emphasizes the importance of the "voices" of People of Color through storytelling (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT recognizes that race is a "significant factor in

determining inequity in the United States” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 48). It places the race at the forefront, recognizing that we live in a racialized society that has oppressed Black students’ education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). “So complete is this exclusion that Black students often come to the university in the role of intruders—who have been granted special permission to be there” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 60). I used CRT as a model to critically analyze SAS EOF students’ experiences with microaggressions, institutional racism, and sense of belonging at Rutgers. Through CTR I turned the lens towards the student experience at Rutgers. In speaking with these students and capturing their voices, I better understood their views about Rutgers’ campus racial climate and perceptions of inclusivity.

The combined frameworks served as guides for a deeper analysis and discovery of how SAS EOF has been used to assist with Black men’s retention through academic support. Furthermore, these frameworks helped me to understand the ways in which Rutgers’ African American, undergraduate males socially integrated into the university and navigate institutional racism through SAS EOF.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design and Collection

This assessment of Rutgers' African American, male, undergraduates' social integration through their participation within the university's Educational Opportunity Fund (SAS EOF) program was shaped by Tinto's theory on student retention and critical race theory (CRT). I used qualitative research methods to identify and evaluate the parts of SAS EOF that support these youths' abilities to navigate institutional racism. In qualitative research, "the inquirer is typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants" (Creswell, 2014, p. 184). This approach permitted me to delve deep into my participants' experiences at Rutgers through the use of direct interviews, focus groups, and observations (Patton, 2002). It was also in line with CRT, as these data collection methods allowed for the subjects' voices to be captured.

The following qualitative methods were used: five observations of SAS EOF activities and events; four semi-structured focus groups, including one with freshmen, two with students in their sophomore through senior year, and one alumni group; and twelve interviews that included discussions with five SAS EOF students, two alumni, one program leader, and four counselors. These methods allowed me to obtain differing views and feedback on the college experience for African American men in SAS EOF. The data collection for this study took place at Rutgers University—New Brunswick in fall 2017 and spring 2018. The goal was to assess the issues and challenges African American men face at Rutgers, how SAS EOF fosters integration into

Rutgers' campus community, how Rutgers SAS EOF students describe their use of the university's support systems, and their perceived limitations of the program. I also determined how these factors related to student retention.

Data Collection Procedures

Observations. Observations enabled me to collect data at the site, on Rutgers' campus, during SAS EOF meetings and workshops, as opposed to a contrived situation (Creswell, 2014). This natural setting was when African American, male students were able to receive the academic and social supports needed to navigate institutional racism. "It is where participants address the issue or problem under the study" (Creswell, 2014, p.185). Information can be gathered up close (Creswell, 2014). As the researcher, I was the data collection instrument and acted as a nonparticipant. I positioned myself discreetly in SAS EOF's student events, where I did not interrupt the activities taking place.

I concentrated on recording handwritten field notes in order to keep my assessments objective. Since it is difficult to capture all that is taking place by notetaking, I started "the observation broadly and then concentrate on my research questions" (Creswell, 2013, p. 166). I observed a mixture of five, hour-long events offered through SAS EOF at Rutgers—New Brunswick. The observations took place during the fall 2017 and spring 2018 semesters in order to evaluate SAS EOF's specific offerings as well as student engagement, statements, and interactions. Prior to this fieldwork, I ensured that permissions were granted by the appropriate contacts.

Focus groups. Focus groups were used because they bring together “people of similar backgrounds and experiences to participate in a group interview about major issues that affect them” (Patton, 2002). Five semi-structured focus groups took place. Three of the groups were comprised of current SAS EOF students and included two groups of students who have persisted past their freshman year onto their sophomore through senior year at Rutgers in order to understand their challenges, supports, and opinions of SAS EOF. One group of freshmen were brought together to assess the issues and challenges within their introductory year. A group of alumni were also brought together to gain an understanding of their experiences within the SAS EOF program and as graduates.

All participants were recruited via an email invitation and/or the SAS EOF Facebook page which had approximately 361 followers and its alumni Facebook group which had 421 members at the time of this study. Each group consisted of no more than five students and lasted about an hour. The questions were structured around the topics of student integration, institutional racism, sense of belonging, and perceptions of self to better address the research questions and topics highlighted in the literature review. The focus groups with students and SAS EOF staff members took place on-site at Rutgers University. The focus groups for alumni took place via a conference call through Zoom, a conference scheduling platform, since the participants could not physically come together to join a group session. With approval by the group members, the conversations were recorded via a tape recorder in order to capture the participants’ exact quotes.

Interviews. Interviews allow interviewees “to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind, to gather their stories” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). The interviewees shared their experiences in the program and explained whether SAS EOF’s activities helped them or the students they serve to stay in college. The interviews took place on campus at locations that were convenient for the participants. Similar to the focus groups, the conversations were recorded via a digital audio recorder and were facilitated after the interviewees’ approval. My goal was to capture participants’ narratives, which follows the CRT model of allowing the voices of marginalized group members to be heard.

I understood that “the nature of an interview sets up an unequal power dynamic between the interviewer and interviewee. In this situation, the interview is ‘ruled’ by the interviewer” (Creswell, 2013, p. 173). I corrected this by setting a conversational tone during our discussions. An interview protocol was used to “ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed” (Patton, 2002, p. 343). The interview protocol was reviewed by SAS EOF facilitators to guide the discussions and ensure that the appropriate questions are incorporated and pertained to the research questions. The protocol was used as a guide, but I allowed myself to incorporate additional questions probed deeper into my interviewees’ experiences. The questions were geared towards identifying SAS EOF activities that succeed in motivating students and helping them to feel a part of the Rutgers community.

I conducted interviews with five SAS EOF students, one SAS EOF program leader, and four SAS EOF counselors. The students were recruited from the focus group and general

outreach for participation in the study. A program leader and counselors were selected based on the SAS EOF's senior administrator and program leader's suggestions and students' feedback. Each interview took about an hour at Rutgers, Zoom, or via a phone call.

Sample

There were currently 1,296 SAS EOF students at the time of this study. The overall sample consisted of twenty-three SAS EOF freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and alumni.

The observations included a purposive selection of students who decided to attend the events. "It is essential that all participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied. Criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experience with the phenomenon." (Creswell, 2013, p. 155). I observed Black, male students as they attended SAS EOF events.

Four focus groups were held, and the participants were purposefully selected. No more than five students were selected to participate in each focus group to permit for all responses to be shared and captured. The total sample for the four focus groups consisted of approximately 16 people. The number of participants also assisted in maintaining validity. "Participants can provide checks and balances on each other, weeding out false or extreme views" (Patton, 2002). The number of participants enabled me to better capture the participants' overall assessments of their experiences. The study is limited by geography, since participants must meet in person when participating in the focus group.

The focus groups was comprised of:

1. A purposefully-selected sample of African American, male, SAS EOF students who were in their sophomore, junior, or senior year. This sample joined two separate focus groups, during which the students shared their experiences and activities in the program and whether these activities helped them progress beyond their freshman year in the program. Topics focused on their relationship with peers and counselors.
2. A purposefully-selected sample of African American, male, SAS EOF students who are in their freshmen year. This group of first year students was introduced to capture whether they are persisting at Rutgers, and if so, through what measures. Topics focused on their relationship with peers and counselors.
3. A purposeful sample of African American, male, SAS EOF alumni who have participated all four years as a SAS EOF student. SAS EOF alumni are described as a tight knit community who go on to obtain successful careers and remain close with their fellow alumni. I wanted to discover the factors that enable this group to persist through their college years and remain connected to each other. Topics included their present ties to SAS EOF and perceptions of the program post participation.

I recruited three male students and one alumni from the focus groups to take part in one-on-one interviews. These participants were either selected based on their initial responses and potential for deeper analysis or because group participants volunteered to disclose further information about their experiences. There were additional one-on-one student and alumni interviewees, who joined this study in response to my promotional emails and/or Facebook posts.

These interviewees volunteered to share their stories.

In addition, I randomly selected four SAS EOF program counselors for one-on-one interviews. Three out of the four counselors happened to be graduates of EOF programs. This was not intentional. These conversations provided an additional lens as to how program leaders designed the SAS EOF program and its activities and what features they believe are helpful to Black males' social integration within Rutgers. A SAS EOF program leader was selected to join an interview based on her position within the program.

The participants demographics, roles, and data collection methods are highlighted in Table 1.

Participants' Information

Table 1

Name	Role	Race	Gender	Data Collection Method
SAS EOF Students				
Abe	Freshman	Black	Male	Focus Group
Damian	Sophomore	Black	Male	Interview, Focus Group
Carl	Sophomore	Black	Male	Focus Group
Jack	Freshman	Black	Male	Focus Group
Jason	Sophomore	Black	Male	Interview, Focus Group
Joe	Sophomore	Black	Male	Focus Group
Julian	Junior	Black	Male	Focus Group

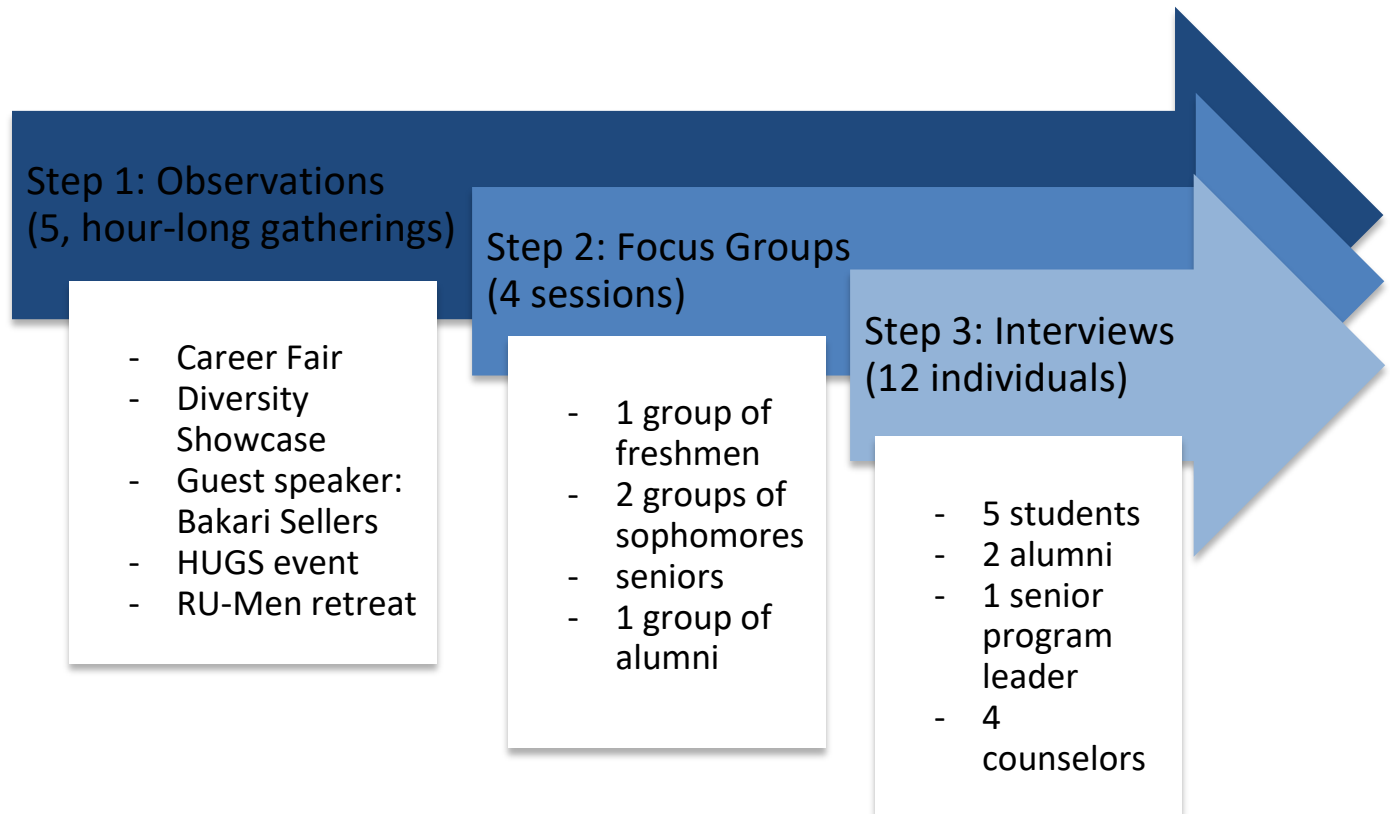
Lamar	Sophomore	Black	Male	Interview
Nigel	Senior	Black	Male	Interview
Paul	Freshman	Black	Male	Focus Group
Raymond	Sophomore	Black	Male	Interview
Rick	Freshman	Black	Male	Focus Group
Sam	Freshman	Black	Male	Focus Group
Theo	Sophomore	Black	Male	Focus Group
Travis	Sophomore	Black	Male	Focus Group
SAS EOF Staff				
Fabian	Counselor, EOF Alumnus	Black	Male	Interview
Jane	Counselor, Alumna	Hispanic	Female	Interview
Laura	Counselor, Alumna	Black	Female	Interview
Wilson	Counselor	Black	Male	Interview
Sharon	Program Leader	White	Female	Interview
SAS EOF Alumni				
Kevin	Alumnus, 2003	Black	Male	Interview, Focus Group
Larry	Alumnus, 2006	Black	Male	Interview
Mike	Alumnus, 1995	Black	Male	Focus Group
Patrick	Alumnus, 1978	Black	Male	Focus Group

Terms and Key Phrases

My definitions of “persistence” and “retention” followed the student measures used by the National Center for Education Statistics (2003). “Persistence” was viewed as the internal, student drive to continuously progress through college each semester without a leave of absence. “Retention” referred to the institute of higher education’s effort to progress students through college. Integration was defined as the “extent to which the individual shares the normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty in the institution and abides by the formal and informal structural requirements for membership in that community or in the subgroup of which the individual is a part” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 51). “Social integration” and “academic integration” were determined by peer and institutional academic and social support systems.

The terms “African American” and “Black” were used interchangeable to identify the same ethnic population within the United States. However the term “actual African American” was adopted by the student participants in this study to refer to African Americans with cultural backgrounds historically and predominantly tied to the United States. I introduced the term “historically African Americans” to refer to the what students deemed were “actual African Americans.” The terms “Black,” “White,” “White American,” “People of Color,” and “Men of Color” were all capitalized to refer to a group of individuals with a shared racial background. “People of Color” and “Men of Color” were used as a category that includes “Black men” or “African Americans.”

In order to prevent distractions from the data and linguistic assumptions, all participants' feedback were rendered in standard English. The voices were still captured in the ways in which they spoke and incorporated the words that they used, but not all speech patterns were reflected. Interjections such as "um" or the overuse of the word "like" were removed to focus the study on the participants' actual words and sentences.

Methodology Timeline

Data Analysis

The audio from the focus groups and interviews were transcribed using rev.com since this tool was successfully used in my class assignments. My notes from the observations were typed into a Word document. I printed out all transcripts, reviewed the information, and deductively assigned codes to the data using my research questions as a guide. The codes included student background, black male experience, and predominantly white institution. Once the codes were identified, the responses were imported into Dedoose, a research evaluation tool. I then tagged the responses with the codes while in Dedoose. The data was sorted and assessed per code to capture key takeaways.

While the initial codes served as an anchor, I inductively coded the data to further explore students' experiences in SAS EOF. Additional codes included head start, personal touch, and prove them wrong. My process consisted of "winnowing the data, reducing them to a small, manageable set of themes to write into my final narrative" (Creswell, 2013). It allowed me to identify excerpts that are relevant to the research questions (Rubin, 2016). "When discussing the evidence for a theme or category, the basic idea is to build a discussion that convinces the reader that the theme or category emerges from the data" (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007).

The reoccurring findings helped me to craft the stories that are being told through the observations, focus groups, and interviews. They allowed me to answer my research questions, fully understanding in what ways and to what extent participation in SAS EOF helps African American men to adjust academically and socially at Rutgers and navigate institutional racism. I was also able to assess the potential limitations of the program.

Establishing Validity

The findings were validated through triangulation, which makes use of multiple and different data sources to provide corroborating evidence and construct meaning (Creswell, 2013). I triangulated the data by comparing the transcripts from the interviews and focus groups with those of the observations to identify common themes and counter themes that reflect real-life disparities (Creswell, 2014). These themes indicated that the same data was coming from different sources, ensuring that the findings are trustworthy and “transferable between the researcher and those being studied” (Creswell, 2013, p. 246).

To further establish validity, I conducted some member checking. I showed the transcripts to interviewees in order to confirm their responses. Through this follow-up interview, I solicited “participants’ views on the credibility of the findings and interpretations” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). Through this action, I was able to ensure that I was not reinterpreting the participants’ statements. At the conclusion of this study, I was able to gain a better understanding about how participation in Rutgers’ School of Arts and Sciences Educational Opportunity Fund helped African American men to navigate institutional racism and socially integrate at Rutgers University.

Role of the Researcher

My racial identity as a Black female, immigrant, and African American coupled with my history as a Rutgers alumna and higher education administrator made me very familiar with this research topic. As a Black, female I understand the student participants’ experiences with microaggressions and institutional racism because I have had similar, though different,

experiences. I know personally and through the literature that these subtle forms of racism can negatively shape students' experiences. I also have many Black men in my family and as friends, and I am familiar with their experiences with microaggressions while they were at college. Given my close relation to this topic, I know that I may present a more bias perspective on Black men and the issue of their retention in higher education.

However, I also know that my background is different from my study participants for several reasons. I am a woman, and I am aware that there are differing stereotypes and challenges between Black men and women, as seen in the national retention rates within higher education. While I also identify as African American, I have immigrant experience which may have shaped my interpretation of the participants' feedback. I have also been fortunate to have been raised in working and middle class environments, which is unlike my participants' experiences. In addition, I have worked in the education field, supporting Black and White students from lower to upper socioeconomic backgrounds, so I understand my participants' socioeconomic status, while realizing that my predominantly middle class experience is not the same as their journey.

Despite these differences, I am more sensitive towards this research topic because I know the weight of these men's issues and the gravity of the problems that occur when they do not persist to degree completion. It can be assumed that my background and identity may have uniquely shaped my lens as opposed to a White, female researcher who would be studying this topic. While I believed that I could lean on my identity and close relation to this topic in order to provide greater insight and understanding of my work, I was completely aware that I needed to

refrain from introducing my own biases. As a researcher, I had to emotionally and professionally detach from the students' experiences with microaggressions. This is indicated by the objectivity used and expressed throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing of my findings. This is also why I have disclosed and commented "on my past experiences and biases that may have impacted the inquiry" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). I also documented my notes for accuracy and to refrain from introducing my opinions into the analytical process. In addition to these efforts, I leaned on the use of validity and triangulation to ensure that the data in this study was sound.

Chapter 4: A Financial, Personal, and Academic Bridge For Belonging At Rutgers

Introduction

The issue of Black men's academic and social integration at Rutgers, a predominantly White institution (PWI), can not be fully understood without exploring the challenges that Black men bring with them into their university experience. In this chapter, we explore the financial, personal, and academic challenges that Black, male School of Arts and Sciences Educational Opportunity Fund (SAS EOF) students bring with them into their university experience that work against their retention. Financial challenges include SAS EOF's insufficient funding of students' education and participants' need to work while going to school in order to fund their education. Personal challenges include students' lack of support from families and experiences with racial assumptions. Academic challenges include their lack of preparation for navigating their studies at Rutgers. This chapter also outlines how the SAS EOF program is proactively working to mitigate these issues through their informal financial supports, counseling and academic planning opportunities, motivational communication and discussions, and initiatives to give students a "head start" in order to increase their academic performance. This chapter also highlights how the SAS EOF program falls short in meeting its Black, male students' needs. The findings within this study are consistent with three of the four factors that Tinto (1987) believes affects student retention: academic preparedness, goal commitment, and economic issues. It was discovered that these factors do shape the study participants abilities to retain at Rutgers.

SAS EOF Bridges Students' Financial Gap ... With Limitations

African American men in the SAS EOF program shared that their grant is helpful but

does not fully support their education. SAS EOF staff were aware of this issue and attempted to informally support students through a gift account, thereby working as a financial bridge.

However, Black men in the program not only struggled with financing their academics, but some participants also worked more than one job in order to support their families at home. These responsibilities were additional stressors for these students that challenged their retention.

SAS EOF's formal and informal financial assistance. Although SAS EOF is a grant for students from a low socioeconomic status, the grant was not enough for the Black men in this study to afford their education, which challenged their persistence through Rutgers. Lamar, an SAS EOF student who participated in a one-on-one interview, was among the students who expressed this sentiment. He said, "I wish they had more resources and funding ... which is a weakness that they have too." Lamar believed that SAS EOF did not provide enough money for him and other men to afford a Rutgers education, which is an area that needed improvement.

New to higher education, some SAS EOF students, like Lamar, were not aware of all of the costs involved in attending Rutgers. Kevin, an SAS EOF alumnus from 2003, recalled when he was a student and discovered, to his surprise, that he had additional expenses to pay for while in college. He noted that, "One of the things I did not realize was [that] college is not a one-time payment deal ... but there are other expenses, so even while you are in college, you are still spending. There are books ... supplies." Kevin was blindsided by the additional expenses that were required for higher education because he was a first generation student and just discovering all the costs involved in his studies. Like Lamar and Kevin, all of the alumni and student participants in this study expressed that SAS EOF needed to improve its financial assistance.

Laura, an SAS EOF counselor and alumna of the program, gave insight into how the SAS EOF program formally helped students to afford their education. She said that SAS EOF students who live on campus are given a \$700 a semester grant, which is approximately \$1,400 a year, while commuters receive \$575 per student. She explained, “It is a state mandated federal grant, so we do not get to set the amounts, unfortunately.” Since it is a federal grant, Laura said that SAS EOF was not able to control the amount of money given to students, but students who were seeking acceptance into SAS EOF were able to waive their college application fee to help save them funds. She also shared that in addition to the grant and waived application fee, students who were accepted into SAS EOF were able to qualify for additional government assistance. Damian, an SAS EOF sophomore student who participated in a one-on-one interview and focus group, noted that the “EOF program definitely confirmed my eligibility for all those federal grants and loans, so I’m very grateful for that.” Damian was able to obtain additional financial support because he was an incoming SAS EOF student. Like Damian, the majority of students shared their appreciation for the financial support that the SAS EOF program formally gave them. Nigel, an SAS EOF student in his senior year, furthered this point:

The program has really helped me address my financial needs through the [additional] grants [and] the EOF grant that I get each semester because ... college is very expensive. I am very fortunate to be here because there are many people who do not have the same opportunity that I am having right now, so I do not take it for granted. EOF has definitely helped me financially through the grants that I receive each semester.

Nigel expressed his gratitude for SAS EOF’s financial assistance because without it, he may not have been able to afford Rutgers due to the costs. He was aware that attending college comes with a higher price tag that may be unaffordable for him and other Black men, so he did not take

his college attendance for granted.

SAS EOF staff were aware that, despite the program's formal means of financial supports, their students still struggled to afford their education. As a result, SAS EOF incorporated informal methods of financially supporting students. The program's staff members personally contributed to an internally created gift account, one that is outside of the State of New Jersey's grant, in order to help students with special circumstances or those who have additional funding needs. Laura shared:

When students study abroad, we can give them a couple hundred bucks, so the gift account has been very, very helpful. We have even helped students with rent payment if a student lives off campus, and they are about to get evicted. ...

Laura said that SAS EOF set up its own, informal funding to help students afford their housing and to overcome additional unforeseen financial hardships. She also shared that other counselors, like Wilson, used their own money to help meet students' financial needs. She said, "For his birthday instead of having a birthday party, Wilson does a brunch, and all proceeds go to a scholarship that he gives to an EOF student that is currently struggling to pay their term bill." She indicated that Wilson, like the rest of the staff, went above the standard operating procedures to help bridge the financial gap in which SAS EOF was not able to do formally.

Sharon, an SAS EOF leader, shared that the gift account and other, informal financial supports were ways in which the staff attempted to lead students by example. It was their hope that students who have benefitted from their informal assistance and graduated would financially assist other SAS EOF students. She said, "With the cost of a Rutgers education, the grants alone are not doing it for them. ... [As a result] they [students] could fill out a special project funding

form. ... We call it 'the pay it forward.' So it is like, 'Dear Student, we are helping to fund your experience studying abroad. When you are in a position to do so, please consider helping a future EOF scholar.'" Sharon believed that by giving the students this additional financial support and encouraging them to do the same, future SAS EOF students would benefit from the program's formal and informal financial assistance.

Students' challenges balancing work, school, and home. SAS EOF program staff members strived to support all of their students' educational expenses through both traditional and nontraditional methods, but despite these financial supports, I found that many of the men interviewed for this study still had to work while attending school, which further challenged their persistence within Rutgers. As Lamar shared:

The program is great and all, but if you need extra support or if you need other things that you can not find through the program, you go outside to get it. And there are a lot of people that do it. There are a lot of people that have two, three jobs because what they [SAS EOF] give you and what they help you get is still not enough.

Although he felt positively about the SAS EOF program, Lamar expressed that he and other students had to take on multiple jobs in order to fully afford their college expenses. Similar to Lamar, Larry recalled that when he first got to Rutgers, he went home every weekend because he needed to work.

The students did not only have to work in order to financially support their education, but they also had to financially contribute to their families. Jane, an SAS EOF alumna and counselor who had been advising students for 30 years about various financial issues, said that this additional challenge had a direct effect on Black men's retention at Rutgers. She said, "Unfortunately there is still a good number of students that work because they have to help their

parents financially, to help their parents' situation, which surprises me all the time ... A lot of them do struggle with keeping a job, keeping two jobs.” She explained that these men sometimes worked multiple jobs in order to manage their finances, which put a strain on their abilities to focus on their studies and remain in college. Lamar supported this assertion:

Most of the time you are the smartest person in your household. You are, some of the times, the most proactive. Sometimes you are the breadwinner at home. Sometimes your family is working, and they are not making enough and you got to support them while at school.

Lamar suggested that some Black, male students, like himself, had to financially support their families because they are the main source of their family's livelihood. Even if they were not the main contributor to their household income, many of the students played an important role in fueling their family's finances, which pulled them away from their education. The additional responsibility of being the breadwinner or financial contributor to their family appeared to be a major challenge that Black men in the SAS EOF program brought with them into the university.

The African American men in this study expressed that their families did not always support them with their educational pursuits because they did not fully understand the responsibilities of juggling college and working, which further challenged their persistence.

Fabian, a counselor who graduated from an Educational Opportunity Funded Program outside of Rutgers, further explained:

We can even just look at what is going on at home. If you come from a home where you do not have a mom or a dad or income is low or you have parents that [say] I did not have this. What makes you think you are going to have it? Or you have to take care of your little brothers or sisters or cousins or whatever. Those pieces, those stressors, I think that all adds to it. I am not just talking for Black people. I am not saying it does not happen for other folks, but I think that those numbers are higher in our community. I think all those pieces feed into it ... which makes it difficult if your parents or your guardians do

not understand why you need the weekends to study.

According to Fabian, Black men were uniquely challenged by the fact that their families may not understand their academic commitments. He mentioned that students were stressed because they are expected to contribute to their homelife and lacked the support and understanding of their higher educational dreams.

This topic was raised during an RU-1st Forum held in February 2018 to explore and share best practices to increase retention and four-year graduation rates of students who are first-generation, low-income, and/or historically underrepresented. During the event, a panel of 7 experts in the field of education discussed the issues first generation students face, in a packed multipurpose room filled with more than 120 attendees. One of the female guest speakers directly, who worked with the State of New Jersey, stated that “working and that kind of stuff. Now... that has some kind of effect and impact on retention.” The Black male students, who attended the event nodded in agreement with the speakers. Lamar, an SAS EOF student who participated in a one-on-one interview and attended the event, also raised this issue. He said:

It really is because you only get so much in financial aid and then you can only max out your loans for a certain amount, so the rest is just ... I have got to get money. I have go to work and work-study only covers some of my hours, and they cap you after a certain pay and then you have to get a second job and it is really tough. Then on top of that you got to study, and then depending on what major you have, you would be a engineer or you could be a pre-med or you could be biology, there's just so many different stuff you got to go through and then just to manage all that. When the program says, “Oh, we got free time.” ... You are just like, I need time for me. I need time to rest. I need time to sleep. I need time to hang out with friends.

According to Lamar, Black men found it difficult to maintain their academic performance and socially integrate because of their additional financial responsibilities. Larry, an alumnus who

graduated in 2006, supported Lamar's claims. When reflecting on his college years, he recalled having to go to the financial aid office at least once a semester to resolve payment issues. He said that he was always "borderline dropping out of Rutgers" due to his finances. He said, "Rutgers was not going to pay for it, but the welfare was not going to pay for it because they felt like Rutgers should because I was there." Students like Larry may have no other choice but to work and attend Rutgers or not attend college at all. Given these difficult choices and not enough support at home for their college endeavors, Black men in SAS EOF were challenged with retaining at Rutgers.

SAS EOF Bridges Students' Personal Challenges, Counters Racist Assumptions

The students in this study shared that, as Black men from low socioeconomic environments, they have been told that they are either not good enough to attend college, "selling out" by attending college, and/or stereotypically labeled as an "aggressor." Their feedback supported researchers who argue against societal assumptions that we are now in a "post-racial" society that does not perpetuate historically racist relations (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). The students said that these remarks challenged their persistence, but it was observed that SAS EOF countered their internalization of these remarks by offering discussions, events, and emails geared towards their retention.

Personal challenges students bring with them into college. Some students shared that their family members assumed that they are not smart enough to earn a college degree, which challenged their motivation and belief that they can earn a college degree. During SAS EOF's Rutgers Male Empowerment Network (RU-MEN) Retreat for Men of Color, the program leaders

proactively gave the men space and time for group discussions about their personal challenges, including other people's perception of them as Black, male college students. A counselor from Rutgers Counseling, ADAP, and Psychiatric Services (CAPS) led the session and asked the attendees, who were predominantly Black men, if they believed that their lives have a central theme. The men were invited to stand up and share their perspective. Out of the 20 men who attended the event, eight of the men raised their hands, 7 guys leaned forward, and 5 of the total number of men placed their heads in their hands. Based on their body language, this was a hot button topic for them. The students who raised their hands, stood up and took turns sharing the themes of their lives as Black men:

Student in gray sweatpants: Powerless ... It made me more nihilistic. ... I have a realization of the world which pressed me down.

[Two men nodded their heads in agreement.]

Student in black sweatshirt: I have to work 2xs as hard to show I am worth it.

Student in gray pants, gray sweatshirt: My father told me I am not good enough. Not worth it. F-you. You will never make it.

[Half of the students in the room nod in agreement and shift uncomfortably.]

Student wearing glasses: I am stupid. My family was saying that I am retarded. Why are you trying? ... You are a sell out.

The CAPS counselor asked how the student in the glasses felt about being labeled as "stupid."

Together, they concluded that feeling "stupid" by family members meant that the young man felt inadequate or not good enough. The discussion caused some of the men to visibly cry, and one gentleman had to leave the room when another student shared his thoughts of suicide. When asked about the themes shared during the session, Nigel said, "A lot of Black men have it a lot

harder, you know, especially, if the environment that you grew up in does not place an emphasis on education.” According to Nigel, Black men from a low socioeconomic status may not have supportive family members who believe that they are smart enough to earn a degree. He indicated that they are uniquely challenged because their home life is different from White, males from a higher socioeconomic status.

Negative and racist assumptions students bring with them into college. In addition to internalizing negative feedback about their academic abilities, the study participants shared that they were challenged by being stereotypically labeled as an aggressor. This feedback was also captured during the RU-MEN retreat. The CAPS counselor asked the men to write down and share the top three things that they internalize as men of color. They were then asked to put an asterisk next to their top word. The students who volunteered to share their thoughts said:

Student in blue sweatshirt, wearing glasses: Not as smart. You are a weapon.

CAPS Counselor: How many people have heard this?

[All of the students raised their hands]

Student wearing a headscarf: Aggressor, criminal, ghetto.

[Aggressor is the top word.]

[Six students raised their hands in agreement.]

Student wearing a skull cap: Just like my father, not as smart, negativity ... no stupidity.

[Just like his father is the top word that had a negative connotation. Seven of the men raised their hands in agreement with.]

Overall, the men felt as if they were being told that they are not smart enough for Rutgers and

were aggressors, making them unfit for a college education. Based on the students' response and observed actions, it was assumed that the students have internalized these negative remarks, which they carry with them into the university.

Kevin, an SAS EOF alumnus from 2003, credited the program with providing opportunities similar to the retreat in which Black, male students can talk about the unique issues and biases they bring into the university that challenges their abilities to retain. He said it was comforting when these conversations take place in SAS EOF gatherings, and you heard that, "I am the first person [to attend college] ... My brother is locked up, or you know, so and so is going through troubles. ... [These are] real parts of our story, so it was interesting to see folks open up and share their lives in a way. And that only happened at that particular meeting." Kevin reflected on his own experience and believed that the students' shared experiences helped to reaffirm their goals and motivate them to persist. He also thought that similar, open discussions only happened during SAS EOF's group sessions, which was beneficial to the students.

Countering negative and racist assumptions. The SAS EOF program helped to alleviate Black, male students' experiences with negative and racist assumptions by hosting guest speakers who were African American, male college graduates in order to motivate the students. Bakari Sellers was among the guest speakers who spoke to SAS EOF students during the fall 2017 semester. When observing the event, it was apparent by the packed room of approximately 100 students that there was a clear interest in hearing from a prominent Black man, like Sellers. The Black men who attended the event noticeably leaned in, remained silent,

and appeared to pay keen attention to Sellers talk. He addressed why it was important for them to get a college education. Sellers said:

Go outside of your gates ... This is what I mean by being an example. When people see me in a suit, there are three things that they think I can be. They think I am either a pastor, a lawyer, which I am, or a funeral director. And the reason is that they say those three things because those are the three things that they associate Black men in suits with. They see a pastor. They need the attorney, and everybody sees a funeral home director at some point. ... No matter how old you are, dream with your eyes open.

Sellers urged the students to complete their degrees in order to provide future Black, male students with more examples of Black men in a variety of professions. His inspiring remarks about dreaming big and achieving their goals countered the negative messages that the students shared during the RU-MEN Retreat.

In addition to hosting guest speakers who served as positive role models for Black men, Sharon, SAS EOF program leader, lent her support to the students by sending out daily “Good News” emails that highlighted career opportunities and spotlighted alumni successes. Sharon used the alumni updates to counter the challenges that students faced and motivate them towards degree completion. As Sharon explained, “We need to communicate with our students, so basically ... any email that I send out, because that is the university's way of doing business, ... also gets replicated on our Facebook and our Instagram. So we will reach students wherever they are because I want them to know of opportunities that are available to them.” Sharon purposely shared her message through all communication channels in order to ensure that students did not overlook these examples and opportunities.

Laura gave insight into how these emails served Black men in the program. “She [Sharon] loves her networking ... she collects information from alumni ... and then sends them

out to our students ... 80% of this stuff is opportunities for them ... so every day they are getting a scholarship opportunity, job opportunity.” Laura explained that the majority of the students expressed that the emails helped motivate them and connect them with opportunities. As Damian said, “I still look at them [the emails] because ... I can start preparing for next year. ... I can see myself like in a couple years having these skills. ... So, I definitely just read all of them anyway. And they are helpful.” The emails also served as a bridge to opportunities, giving students, like Damian, direction and motivation about what to major in and to plan for in the coming years.

Raymond, a focus group participant, agreed. He said, “If I did not get the email from [Sharon]... I [wouldn't] know I was going to become a social work major. I would not know I was going to get a job there. It created a brand new opportunity for me.” Sharon’s “Good News” emails helped students like Raymond and Damian to get information and opportunities that they and other students would not be aware of because of their newness to college. It also kept students motivated to work towards degree completion as opposed to internalizing negative assumptions about their academic abilities.

SAS EOF Bridges Students’ Academic Gap and Sense of Belonging

The student and alumni participants shared that their high schools did not fully prepare them for entering higher education, despite their high ranking in those schools. This “unequal schooling” caused them to believe that they were behind and needed to “catch up” to White males (Carter, 2013, p. 143). SAS EOF helped these men to get their much-needed “head start” by academically integrating its students into Rutgers through a Summer Institute and academic

planning support. However, the participants expressed that not enough Black men knew about the SAS EOF program, which may have resulted in a population of Black men who miss out on getting supported in their higher educational pursuits.

Students' need to catch up and academically integrate. The men in this study expressed that they came into Rutgers without full academic preparation, which further challenged their persistence. Some of the participants ranked at the top of their high schools, but they still struggled with getting high grades at Rutgers because their high schools were not as strong as the schools attended by their White, male counterparts. This feedback supported other researchers' findings on the unequal schooling of Black and White students, which "fuels the opportunity gap" (Carter, 2013, p. 143). By nature of being Black men from a low socioeconomic status, this study found that there may be an academic mismatch that takes place when they are entering a predominantly White educational institution, like Rutgers.

Although students, like Nigel, graduated from high school at the top 10% of their class, their high schools did not truly prepare them to academically integrate into Rutgers. As Kevin recalled looking back at his high school experience, "In high school, if there were 30 awards giving out, they called my name at least 21 times. ... I knew that I was a big fish in my city. ... I did not understand GPA. I did not understand ranking." He shared that he was able to get many awards despite the fact that he did not apply himself, which suggested that his high school was not academically rigorous. However, he also said that if he did apply himself in high school and did not hold a stigma against "being called teachers pet" he would have become more academically prepared for Rutgers.

The study participants' lack of academic preparation went deeper than just the fear of looking smart. Sharon, EOF director, explained:

We have superstars in our programs, so they were their high school valedictorians, and they would not have any reason to think that they are not exceptional because they are exceptional. ... But what they do not realize always is, they are sitting side by side in that general chemistry class with a student who went to a private school. ... And they had exposure to AP level labs and courses, and maybe they elected not to take the AP exam, but for our students, maybe their high schools did not offer them that opportunity, so their exposure is the first time. ... Where sometimes our students come in, and because they were the best from their high schools, they are not even aware of what they will be facing when they come to Rutgers with respect to the level of preparation of other students, and this is really where educational disadvantage comes into play.

According to Sharon, some Black men in the SAS EOF program were not as academically prepared as students from a higher socioeconomic status because those men have access to stronger schools. With greater preparation, White male, students from a higher socioeconomic status were able to easily obtain academic credits that moved them closer to degree completion as opposed to Black men from a lower socioeconomic status.

The students in this study also expressed that they attended high schools that did not stress the importance of being individually responsible for their academic outcomes, which is why they came into Rutgers less prepared. Damian revealed that he was comfortable with teachers reminding him of what to do "just little stuff ... 'Do your homework.' ... 'Bring these five problems in tomorrow and you will get a check.' We did not like it at the time, but ... without it, it shows us how much agency you have in the world." Damian believed that he was not taught to have the same level of agency and drive as other students from stronger schools.

Kevin reiterated this point, emphasizing that Black men from a lower socioeconomic status may have attended high schools that did not prepare them to be individually responsible

for their academic outcomes. He noted that there is a “really hard break from what high school was when you graduated, and then there is this new environment, a new way of engaging with folks that is now defined as college. ... Somehow college, academic excellence, became significant overnight.” According to Kevin, he and other Black men in the program, did not have a full understanding of how to academically navigate college before entering Rutgers. There was suddenly new information that they needed to acquire in order to successfully navigate the university.

Kevin’s description of a “new way of engaging” pointed to what all the interviewees stressed as a major challenge for them—“catching up.” The majority of the interviewees expressed that their lack of academic preparation left them in a difficult state of having to catch up and learn how to get good grades at Rutgers. Lamar said, “Some of my frustrations with being behind and always playing catch up [is that] other students from other walks of life, they tend to not understand. They just feel like, ‘Oh that is sad.’ They feel sympathy, but they do not feel empathy because they are not going through the same thing.” Lamar suggested that catching up is a unique experience shared by African American men from low socioeconomic environments who are entering a PWI, like Rutgers. His opinion was supported by Lamar, who said that Black men have an additional challenge of being behind academically and “feel like you are always handicapped. You are always playing catch up.” The students in this study believed that the poor academic preparation they received from their high schools contributed to them feeling as if they were behind in comparison to White, male students.

The SAS EOF program staff was aware that Black men in the program entered the

university with the belief that catching up academically was a huge challenge that prevented them from graduating. Jane, a longtime SAS EOF counselor and alumna, said that “for whatever reason, it was part of the language and the mentality that the counselors and staff tried to build. That ... you are here to work; you are here to make certainly your family and parents proud; and you are here to get good grades.” She shared that this message was not simply expressed by the staff. It was their goal “to make the big university feel like a small friendly campus.” It was their goal to help Black men in the program to feel as if they can “catch up” and succeed at Rutgers. Wilson, a fellow SAS EOF counselor, supported Jane’s statement. During his interview, he said that the program aimed “to make sure that the students have all the resources necessary to not only continue on their educational path, but also graduate, and hopefully, end strongly.” These conversations indicated that the SAS EOF staff worked to support Black men on their path to a college education.

Shifting students from catching up to a head start. It was found that SAS EOF helped Black, male students in the program to “catch up” academically and get a “head start” at Rutgers through its Summer Institute. As the program staff, students, and alumni shared, SAS EOF’s mandatory Summer Institute helped facilitate students’ academic integration at Rutgers, enabling them to persist despite their lack of academic preparation. Jane explained that the Summer Institute, held for five weeks during the summer and 10 weeks of the academic semester, helped students earn credits and receive supplemental instruction in preparation for their time at Rutgers. It enabled the study participants to gain opportunities and support that they did not receive from their high schools.

Each of the men in this study said that the Summer Institute was critical in helping them to adjust academically and socially at Rutgers due to the head start that they gained. Lamar expressed that it helped “to bring them up to par.” Kevin, an alumnus from 2003, shared:

It is literally a head start. You are going to advance 20 paces, 20 steps, 20 insights. Whatever way you want to quantify it, you are going to be ahead of the folks that are just going to arrive here for orientation in August. ... That is the advantage, that extra time prior to the arrival of everyone and getting connected, really getting grounded into the institution. That is invaluable. It is always worth it. ... The value of that summer that you thought you wanted to have is void, when you realize, "Oh, I needed to be here, because this is representative of the next four or five years of my life."

According to Kevin, the Summer Institute gave Black men in the program a head start on their academic experience that may not be received by Black men unaffiliated with SAS EOF. He said that the institute set expectations for his time within Rutgers, so he was prepared for his academic years.

Like Kevin, the majority of men in this study stated that the Summer Institute deeply affected them and gave them a head start on college. Jason, a current SAS EOF student, emphasized that the summer session was informative. He said:

[It] is because you get a head start on ... the academic struggle that you got to deal with at Rutgers. You get to meet friends that you can go into the school with that already have their major that you can study with, that you can network with, that you can just interact with. You are already ahead of everybody else ... and just getting literally to take the classes, you will get an idea of how the classes are going to be, how they are going to be structured, gives you a head start too.

Jason shared that the additional knowledge he gained during the summer helped to build a network and fill the gap of information about college that he was unaware of. Travis agreed with Jason and explained how the Summer Institute helped them. Travis said that he was “still a little shocked coming out of [the first] fall semester, but it was a little lubricated shock ... EOF was

really, really helpful.” Travis was shocked by all of the information he did not have but gained through the summer. The institute served as an eye opener to the Black men in the program because they were very unaware of the academic expectations and discipline needed to be in college.

According to Kevin, the summer program was such a defining component of the SAS EOF program that truly defined SAS EOF. He said, “EOF is a lot of different things, to a lot of people ... It is financial support. It is educational support, but most folks when they think of EOF, they think of the summer.” Kevin recounted that the students believed the Summer Institute was the principle element associated with SAS EOF. The students treasured their experience within SAS EOF because, as Lamar expressed, it helped “to bring them up to par.”

Academic planning to gain a head start and belong. In addition to the Summer Institute, the SAS EOF program helped Black men in the program to get a “head start” by emphasizing the creation of academic plans and timely graduation. Fabian, a counselor who graduated from an Educational Opportunity Funded Program outside of Rutgers, said that he and his colleagues made sure that students discussed their academic plans with them, so they could map out the classes the students should take in order to graduate within four years. Jane also expressed that SAS EOF was deliberate in its efforts to assist students in their academic planning. She shared that students were required to maintain compliance, in other words, they had to meet regularly with their counselors to make academic plans and report their academic progress. Jane emphasized that this was particularly important for incoming, first-year students. She said, “The students that are just getting here, because we kind of really have to watch them

their first semester, we tell them you really should be meeting with your counselor twice a month for the first semester, and if you do well your first semester then it could be once a month like everybody else.” Jane highlighted that the students’ commitment to academic planning and updates decreased once it was apparent that they were academically integrating and thriving at Rutgers.

The students shared that the required compliance and academic planning sessions supported their persistence. Carl, an SAS EOF student who participated in the focus group of students in their sophomores through senior year, said that the staff helped him to plan ahead and envision his upcoming college years in order to work towards degree completion. Carl said, “[I was told] that is what we mostly focus on is ... your academic plan and what you can do so that you will not be here longer than you need to be.” According to Carl, SAS EOF staff instilled in him the goal of graduating from Rutgers and having a roadmap to do so. Other students in this study, including Damian, shared that SAS EOF advised them on how to pair together the right classes, so they could have a better chance of performing well academically. Raymond said, “They teach you how to basically get good grades. ... They teach you time management ... how to prioritize your schedule.” Raymond noted that the counselors gave him the skills needed to perform well academically, which he did not have prior to membership within SAS EOF.

Other students expressed that the academic preparation they gain through SAS EOF helped them to feel as if they belonged at Rutgers. Jason said:

When I came in, I did not have my purpose. I had a counselor meeting about why I am here ... and I got a goal of getting straight A’s. My first month I had a C. Now I have a B+ and think I can reach my goal. ... At the end of the day, we are smart enough to be here. None of that [the stigmas they face as Black men] really matter. I have a reason to

be here. I am no different than anyone else.

By working with his SAS EOF counselor, Jason was able to set and reach his academic goals. He believed that he and other Black men in the program were smart enough and capable of earning an undergraduate degree, despite the negative and racist assumptions that they had encountered. He expressed that SAS EOF helped him to gain the skills needed for him to do well in school, while also allowing him to believe in himself and his abilities. Like Jason, Nigel, shared that SAS EOF helped him to get a better sense of belonging at Rutgers. He also said:

When I first came to Rutgers, it [SAS EOF] gave me a sense of belonging, knowing that there was already a group that was willing to accept me. ... They really helped me, especially my counselor ... She really helped me figure out my life, get my life together again ... EOF was really there for me, it supported me, along with my family too, but EOF really had my back because my first semester, academically was not what I expected.

Nigel highlighted that he was not initially academically prepared to persist through Rutgers and did not get strong grades during his freshman year, but SAS EOF was there to help him improve and feel as if he belonged at Rutgers. He not only gained better grades and confidence through SAS EOF, but he also gained an opportunity to join Seton Hall Law School's summer intensive in preparation for applying to law schools. He credited SAS EOF for bringing him awareness about that opportunity, thereby further supporting his persistence and ability to gain a higher education.

Limitations to gaining a head start. While Black men in the program were able to academically and socially integrate into Rutgers through SAS EOF, the majority of the men in this study shared that other men who need the program may miss out on the opportunity due to a lack of awareness about SAS EOF. The students expressed that they had little to no knowledge

about SAS EOF before joining the program. Carl shared that he discovered SAS EOF while he was a high school student in an Upward Bound program affiliated with Rutgers. However, his early awareness of the program appeared to be in the minority.

The majority of students in this study said that their high school guidance counselors simply told them to apply for Rutgers SAS EOF program as part of their college application, but they did not know what SAS EOF was. Abe said, “I did not really know about it, but then my guidance counselor said, ‘You should apply through there’ and it could help me out ... in college.” Abe had a general understanding that the program could help him, but he was unaware that he would obtain personal support and academic preparation through counselors and initiatives like the Summer Institute. He shared that these are important attributes that other Black, male students who are aspiring to attend college may miss out on because they do not know that the program exists and can benefit them.

Like Abe, Travis explained that his counselor simply told him to apply to SAS EOF as part of his application to Rutgers. He said:

I didn't really know much about it. My counselor just said, ‘There is a summer program.’ And I was like, ‘Oh, that sounds fun.’ And I just checked it on the Rutgers application that I wanted to be considered for EOF. ... I don't think anybody in my high school knew about the EOF Program. ... [Without SAS EOF] I would have even less friends. I would have probably been taking really hard classes. ... I would have definitely had a different experience [without the program] because EOF really oriented me.

Travis viewed SAS EOF as a just a grant available through the application process, but he did not anticipate the gaps in his academic abilities and ways in which SAS EOF would be able to help him fill those gaps. Similarly, Jack expressed that he found SAS EOF during the application process to attend Rutgers. He said, “I might have checked it off or something.

Honestly, I have no idea. I do not remember.” Jack recalled that he only knew about SAS EOF because it was on his application form, but without seeing this, he would have missed the opportunity to be supported while at Rutgers.

The men in this study highlighted that there needed to be greater awareness about SAS EOF and its resources for Black, male students. Damian explained that for “some people from an urban area, they don't know about EOF. It is ... [because of] multiple factors, like they do not know about EOF, or Rutgers [is] expensive, or they do not know how to apply for colleges, or they do not have a support system.” Damian pointed to the fact that some Black men may not have enough support in their home environments to help them know that SAS EOF exists. Without this awareness, it could be assumed that there were Black men who could benefit from the program but were not able to receive this help because of their lack of awareness that SAS EOF existed.

Conclusion

In the absence of SAS EOF, Black, male students from a low socioeconomic status would be further challenged to retain at Rutgers due to the financial, personal, and academic challenges that they bring with them into their university experience. It was found that these students carried additional stress and self-doubt because of these challenges, which prevented them from performing well academically. SAS EOF was able to provide these students with both formal and informal financial assistance, despite the fact that it was not enough to completely cover the cost of their degrees. The program also motivated students with examples of successful Black male college graduates in order to counter their experiences with negative and racist assumptions

about their abilities. The study participants gained a “head start” on their academic journey through SAS EOF, which worked against their need to “catch up” to their White, male counterparts. Through these efforts, SAS EOF performed as a bridge for the participants, which helped them to persist at being at Rutgers. With greater awareness of SAS EOF, it can be assumed that more Black men can benefit from the program’s support and have a better chance of persisting at Rutgers. Without an increased level of awareness about SAS EOF, there may be Black men who miss out on the opportunity to join the program and continue struggling with retention. While SAS EOF bridged several of the issues that Black, male students’ bring into Rutgers, we still need to look at their on-campus experience and whether there are additional factors that shape their social and academic integration.

Chapter 5: A Peer Group For Persistence

Introduction

This chapter explores how peer membership within the School of Arts and Sciences Educational Opportunity Fund (SAS EOF) program helps Black, male student members to socially integrate into Rutgers. Students in this study believed that, as a whole, Rutgers University was not as diverse as it claimed to be, and this lack of diversity gave them a segregated social experience. This included differing experiences on the university's campuses based on their race as well as experiences with microaggressions by their professors and peers. The participants attempted to counter their experiences with microaggressions by changing their behaviors to avoid negative stereotypes and seeking out Rutgers' Black, student community for support. The participants shared that the Black, student community at Rutgers, outside of SAS EOF, was fragmented, but they were able to ultimately find support from peers within SAS EOF, which served as a unifying entity and source of support for Black students in the program. In addition to these findings, the study participants shared their concerns with the decreasing population of Black men in SAS EOF, since the Black community within the SAS EOF supported their persistence at Rutgers.

Representation On Campus and Microaggressions

The participants revealed that they perceived and felt Rutgers' statistically small number of Black men on campus. This lack of diversity was opposite of the university's message and evident of Rutgers' history of institutional racism. The participants also shared that their lack of representation was a greater issue because of their experiences with microaggressions by some of

their White professors and peers. These experiences challenged their persistence within the university.

Diversity and divisions. The SAS EOF men in this study shared that the lack of Black male representation on campus challenged their abilities to socially integrate into Rutgers. Raymond, one of the study participants, stated that Rutgers was not as diverse as it presented itself as being. He said, “People can be like, oh, Rutgers is so diverse, but if you look at the stats, Rutgers is not that diverse. You could barely see it ... I could barely see African American males on this campus ... since we are only 8, 7%.” He believed that the small population of Black students was clearly visible to him. Damian, another student participant in this study, also expressed the same opinion. In our focus group interview, he said that he “does not feel like Rutgers is that diverse at all.” Damian highlighted that the low population of Black men at Rutgers was clearly seen and felt. Travis, another student participant, credited other ethnic minority groups with enhancing Rutgers’ image of diversity. He said that the university believed that it was diverse because of the “influx of ... Asian population, and that is bringing up the diversity.” According to Travis, Rutgers did not have a truly diverse population that included African American men. All of the students in the focus group discussions about this topic either nodded or chimed in agreement that Rutgers was not as diverse as it perceived itself as being.

Participants’ sense of belonging was shaped by the statistically small number of Black male students on campus. Jack, who was involved in Rutgers Residential Hall Association, noted that “there is [only] like three black presidents.” He explained that this was a low number, given the large amount of students that were involved in the Residential Hall Association. He

also believed that the population of Black men on campus was lacking, which gave the impression that Black men did not belong at Rutgers. He said, “It is not like there are attitudes that other people give me, but like statistically, it looks like we don't belong. Because there is not a lot of us representing.” According to Jack, Rutgers’ demographics sent out a message that the university was not inclusive of Black men. The study participants also stated that they frequently noticed a small amount of Black, male students in their classes. Larry, an alumnus from 2006, recalled his experience. He said, “So [in] my calc II class, my differential geometry, I know I was the only Black guy in there. I just remember looking around.” Larry expressed that it was surprising that he was the only Black man in his classes, which he did not anticipate coming into Rutgers, given its message of diversity and inclusion.

The participants also noted that the lingering effects of institutional racism and the low population of Black men on campus created a segregated social experience across Rutgers’ campuses, which shaped their sense of belonging at Rutgers. The students and alumni said that they had a better sense of belonging at Rutgers Livingston Campus (formerly Livingston College), where there were more Black students, versus the university’s College Avenue Campus (formerly Rutgers College), which had a higher concentration of White students. Historically, Rutgers students were admitted to Rutgers by campus, with each campus ranked against each other. Both the students and alumni expressed that the campus ranking had a racial undercurrent that was still present and continued to shape their student experience. Mike, an SAS EOF alumnus from 1995, explained:

I am not knocking anybody. Do not get me wrong, but to be Black and to be admitted to Rutgers College ... You know, that was like getting into Harvard. Because Rutgers was

very strict in terms of who they let in. So, if you had Rutgers, you were “the elitist.” I am not putting myself on a pedestal, but that is what we thought we were. Because, again, we were at Rutgers College. That was [where] everybody went. Rutgers College.

From Mike’s statement, it appeared that Rutgers’ legacy of institutional racism created a segregated social experience for Black and White students. Black men, like Mike, who were admitted to Rutgers College were perceived as making a rare and positive achievement, as opposed to attending the the predominantly Black and stereotypically inferior Livingston College. Patrick, an alumnus from 1978, said:

Livingston was like Rutgers’ own “HBSC” and that is how they looked at us. Livingston students. Rutgers [College] students. It was two different things. We had our separatism within the university structure itself because when you went over to Livingston you saw 99.9% Black students. Whenever they [White student and faculty members] looked at you, they assumed you were from Livingston College and would assume that versus Rutgers College. That was outright blatant racism I would say. They assumed you were not equal to them by being on that campus.

Patrick shared that Black and White students were stereotypically assumed to be affiliated with Rutgers’ distinct campuses based on their race. According to Patrick, White students and professors assumed that he and other Black men were admitted to Livingston College because they did not think that Black men were capable of gaining admission through the predominantly White and prestigious Rutgers College.

According to current students, Carl, Damian, and Travis, this division within Rutgers was still present and shaped their social integration. Damian said that “Black Rutgers is still at Livingston.” Damian and the other students’ reference of “Black Rutgers” indicated that they viewed the Black student community, including its small population of Black men, as a separate entity from their White peers. They also shared that Black students gravitated towards the

Livingston Campus because that it was where “Black Rutgers,” a higher concentration of Black students, could be found. Travis explained:

Most of us [Black men] and Latinx are Liberal Arts majors and then Livy [the Livingston Campus] is where all those classes are. That is the reason why everyone wants to be here [on the Livingston Campus] because Livingston is like ‘lit.’ This is where all the people would be. Today, I will be having a little get together outside. You do not really have that on College Ave.

According to Travis, Rutgers’ Livingston Campus was where he and other Black, male students found a higher population of other Black students whom they can socialize with as opposed to the College Avenue Campus. He believed that the majority of Black students were liberal arts majors, which was why they were widely present on Livingston Campus. Regardless of the students’ choice of major, Rutgers’ history of institutional racism continued to shape the students’ social integration within its campuses. It led them to congregate at its stereotypically Black campus, Livingston, in order to locate and connect with other Black, male students, so they would not feel as if they were the only Black people at Rutgers.

Microaggressions by White professors. The participants shared that they also experienced microaggressions from their White professors, which negatively affected their sense of belonging at Rutgers. They said that their White professors questioned their academic abilities either outright or through dismissive stares and snubs, which made them feel as if they did not belong at the university. As is the nature of microaggressions, it makes students feel invisible in the classroom and overlooked (Solorzano, et al., 2000). Mike, an SAS EOF alumnus from 1995, shared that he and his Black, male peers experienced microaggressions from some of his White professors. He said, “Some of the professors did not think that we actually wrote the

work that we did. They did not think that we were smart enough or capable, had the mental capacity to show the excellence that we did.” Mike highlighted the fact that some of his White professors singled out and had lower expectations of Black men as opposed to White, male students. Rick, another participant in the freshman focus group, recalled a similar story in which anytime he entered a White professor’s class a couple of minutes late or asked a question to that professor, he was greeted with dismissive stares. He said, “I don’t want to say that she was racist, but ... she would not even look at me. I know, in a way, it was kinda ... I do not know. I cannot explain it. But I just felt off. I know for a fact ... every time I asked her something, she would act like I was paining her or something. And I seen other people ask her, [and] she would happily answer.” Rick could not identify an overtly racist behavior from his professor, but he picked up on the microaggressions, subtle cues, that he encountered. He knew that he was being treated differently by his professor as opposed to his White peers.

The study participants’ experience with microaggressions from their White professors caused them to feel doubtful about their intelligence and to refrain from seeking help from their White professors. Patrick, an alumnus from 1978, recalled asking his White professor questions within a pre-calculus seminar and then feeling as if he was not as smart as his White peers. He said, “The teacher answered it in a very condescending way, at least that is what I felt. I just shied away from that moment on. I felt like it was a spotlight on me, like the dumb Black kid in the classroom.” Patrick indicated that he felt his White professor’s disregard and belief that he was inferior through his professor’s condescending tone towards him. He suggested that this was only directed at him and not the White students who were in his class, which made him feel

less than his White peers. Students who experience microaggressions feel self-doubt and a lack of fit (Solorzano, et al., 2000). Patrick's account reflected this. Lamar's feedback also highlighted this point. He shared that he avoided his White professor because he experienced similar incidences as Patrick. Lamar said:

Especially People of Color, we do not tend to reach out to these professors ... if they [are] non-Black, as much as we should ... for help and guidance and tutoring and office hours and stuff because we feel like ... It is a combination of schedule and also intimidation. They [are] not going to be as lenient to you as I would say a Black professor, listening to your struggle or hearing, helping you out or giving you the proper advice.

Lamar expressed that he and other Black men distanced themselves from their White professors because they assumed that their White professors would not be as understanding and helpful to them as opposed to when they helped White, male students. It was apparent that Black, male students' experiences with microaggressions negatively shaped the ways in which they socially and academically navigated themselves through Rutgers.

Microaggressions by White peers. The participants shared that they experienced microaggressions by their White peers in the form of stares, questions about their academic abilities, and subtle rejections from predominantly White social gatherings. Laura, a counselor and Rutgers SAS EOF alumna, recalled that a Black, female student was upset because a White classmate suggested that she did not belong at Rutgers because she was Black. The student said that she told her White peer that she was an EOF student, and the White student responded by saying, "Oh, that explains it." According to Laura, the student believed that it was subtly suggested that she was only capable of being a Rutgers student because she entered as a SAS EOF student. The assumption of second-class citizenship is part of the nature of

microaggressions. Laura's account suggested that Black, SAS EOF students are labeled as second-class. Sharon further explained this. She said, "Many people ... felt that the university was quote, 'like doing a favor for these students.'" Sharon said that some of her White counterparts and students assumed that Black men who enter the university through SAS EOF have not earned their position, even though strong academic abilities required for admission into SAS EOF and Rutgers. It appeared that some White students viewed Black students, including Black men in SAS EOF, as less capable of earning a college degree.

Other participants in this study shared that they experienced microaggressions in the forms of some White students' inexplicable stares. Julian said that as a Black man, "you just get stares." He believed that White students stared at him and other Black, male students because there were not a lot of Black men on campus. Travis explained this further, noting that his White peers may have been miseducated about Black people, which is why he and other Black, male students experienced microaggressions. He said, "Most of them [White students] are at least unconsciously perpetuating, operating racist doctrines." According to Travis, his White peers might not have been aware of their actions because their dismissive actions were ingrained in White supremacy. He believed that the White students he encountered at Rutgers treated him and other Black students differently because they did not interact with enough Black people.

Lamar clarified this issue further. He said:

I am going to a Rutgers event and I am a Black person, and everyone just stares at me. And I feel like I am not welcome here ... because most of these people [have] never seen a Black person before ... They [have] seen a stereotype or you know, caricature of Black people. They are staring at you. They are like, "Oh, a Black person walked in." You always got to deal with that. You always got to deal with educating people, people making comments that agitate you because they do not know any better.

Lamar confirmed that he and other Black men were stared at because their White peers were unfamiliar with Black people and only held stereotypical images. As a result, he said that he and other Black, male students had to educate their White peers on how they really were as people.

Other students shared that they experienced microaggressions during predominantly White social events. Patrick, an alumnus from 1978, said that he was the first African American elected as an officer of the Rutgers Fraternity Council because the Black fraternities and sororities made it a mandate to have a Black representative within the predominantly White student board. Patrick also noted that he was later pressured to resign by the council members. He explained:

The things that ... we would talk about in the meeting did not really relate to our fraternities, the Black fraternities and sororities, so I did not have a lot of input. ... I think it was outright racism. ... They did not really listen to what we had to say. Because, again, we had different concerns. ... Nothing was said to me directly, but it was kind of like, keeping the establishment in place from where it has been.

Patrick and other Black men's efforts to socially integrate into Rutgers were blocked by the presence of institutional racism in the fraternal order. He believed that the predominantly White student association ignored his ideas and subtly excluded him because he is a Black man.

Similar to Patrick, Travis recalled attempting to attend a predominantly White fraternity's event with his Black, male friends and being subtly turned away because of their race. He said:

They do not get funding at all, the Black fraternities and sororities, but ... You hear ... [music by Black artists at the predominantly White fraternity's event] but ... no Black people. And, they [the White male fraternity members] would be so intimidating standing on the stairs like, "Oh, keep moving." ... I don't want to say "our," but music made by Black people is playing at parties that does not allow Black people.

According to Lamar, he and friends were subtly turned away from the predominantly White fraternity's party because of their race. He also noted the irony that Black musical artists' works were played at an event in which Black students were not welcomed to attend. Lamar explained that incidences like this "come off as you are not welcome." He said that when Black men are seen together, their White peers may feel uncomfortable, as if "anytime I am with a whole bunch of Black people we are trying to start a race war." He stated that his White peers may have been uncomfortable with his group of friends because of they were unacquainted with Black people and only knew of their negative stereotypes.

The participants attempted to hold their own event at Rutgers in order to socially integrate into the university, but they continued to experience microaggressions. Julian, a SAS EOF student, recounted an experience in which Rutgers Police Department (RU PD) entered his dorm room while he was playing music with a group of friends who are Black men, while a group of White students who were having a party the same day were not interrupted by the police. Laura, a counselor and Rutgers SAS EOF alumna, also mentioned the same incident during our interview. She explained that one of the students turned to her for help. She shared:

They said "Because we [were] three Black, boys in a circle ... [we got] cops rolling up on us." ... So, now, I challenge that. ... However, I cannot discount the fact ...because he is like, "Ms. L, I have sat out here with a group of White boys and nothing [has happened before].

The SAS EOF students in this study believed that they were singled out and treated differently by their White peers and the campus police department because they are Black men. Jack expressed this when he said:

Some [White students] are nice because they are nice, but some of them look at us like,

"Yo, he is different." ... Don 't mess up. Don't do anything ... illegal. That will get you in trouble with the law because being a Black man in a PWI, you are already looked at like you are not supposed to be here.

Jack expressed that he and other Black, male students were treated differently because they were viewed by White people as different and not belonging at Rutgers. As a result, he believed that he and other Black men had to be mindful of their behaviors because they were seen as outsiders. Theo referred to this as "the Black stigma." He said, "There is the Black stigma. It is what you are hearing. Everyone expects an experience. ... Judge, jury, executioner. As if you are guilty before innocent." According to Theo, Black men were negatively stereotyped and seen as not fitting White Supremacist ideals. The "Black stigma" placed them as outsiders of the university community.

The participants also shared that their experiences with microaggressions challenged their retention within Rutgers. Carl described his and other student participants' overall social experience as "not good ... not to the point where, 'Oh, I am going to drop out.' It just pushes you to do more and better." While Carl used these experiences to motivate himself to persist in his education, the majority of the interviewees viewed it as a challenge. Damian believed that Rutgers needed to proactively address the differing treatment that he and other Black, male students were experiencing. As Lamar said, "You are not teaching the history behind them [microaggressions]. So, all you are doing is teaching a bunch of kids that this is a bad word." He stressed that Rutgers needed to do a better job of highlighting the history of microaggressions, otherwise it would continue to manifest in his and other Black, male students' experiences. Laura, a SAS EOF counselor, shared the same belief. She said, "It is always harder

to fight institutional racism because you do not even know sometimes that it is there. ... You got to first identify it, and a lot of times our students cannot even put a name to it. ... I definitely would say that it is my role to help them navigate it.” Laura believed that it was her responsibility to help Black men in the SAS EOF program to navigate their encounters with microaggressions because it affected their retention. She expressed that greater awareness of this issue would help Black men to remain at Rutgers.

Attempts To Counter Institutional Racism and Microaggressions

The students shared several techniques that they used to counter the microaggressions they experience at Rutgers. This included discrediting White students and professors’ stereotypes by “proving them wrong” and seeking support from the Black Rutgers student community. However, they found that the Black student community was fragmented, which complicated their abilities to find a source of support and assistance with their social integration.

Proving them wrong. Black men in the SAS EOF program attempted to counter their “Black stigma” and the microaggressions against them by changing their behaviors in an attempt to fit a White ideology and “prove them wrong.” As highlighted in the literature review, the student participants viewed their experiences with microaggressions as a source of stress and “racial battle fatigue” (Smith et al., 2011). As also found in the literature, this led the students to question their typical actions and identity and feel a “spokesperson pressure” (Dancy, 2011). Nigel shared his attempt to change his actions and prove that his professor’s negative assumption was wrong. He said:

When we walk into class first every semester, and throughout the whole semester, you always have to try and prove the professor wrong. ... You could still be a really smart

kid, but you just like to wear your do-rag to class, but if you are a White professor who sees that ... he or she may think that, “Oh, he is probably going to get a C in the class, or he will be lucky if he passes.” ... You have to try and prove them wrong.

Nigel said that he and his Black, male friends were stereotyped for the way in which they dressed. As a result, he changed the clothes that he wore and sat in the front of his classes, so he could counter his professors’ negative assumptions about him and other Black men. He attempted to discredit negative stereotypes about Black men’s lack of interest and abilities to perform well academically. Lamar shared that he used a similar strategy when interacting with his White professors and peers. He said:

Especially as Black men, ... every time you walk into a room ... you always got to play a part. You cannot truly be yourself. ... This is why they constantly teach you in school, in primary school and secondary school, they always teach you about code switching. When you walk into a place you have got to switch. You cannot just be you. You have to be how they want you to be. ... It is the smallest thing you do and they will disqualify your whole life record because of it.”

Lamar alluded to the fact that he and other Black men had to adjust their behaviors in order to make White peers and professors more accepting of them. He suggested that education teaches this to Black men, and they cannot simply be as they are in order to gain acceptance. This “spokesperson pressure” and need to “prove them wrong” further challenged the study participants’ sense of belonging at Rutgers.

Seeking out the black student community, finding fragmentations. In an effort to socially integrate into Rutgers, Black men in the SAS EOF program turned to the university’s overarching Black student community. The student participants sought out other Black students in order to find support and a sense of belonging to counter their experiences with

microaggressions. Lamar shared that “You cannot truly be yourself. And this is why our [Black students’] closeness is so important. There are certain things that ... you cannot talk about to your White friends, because they will not really understand, that you could talk about with your Black friends.” He believed that there was greater commonalty and comfort within the Black, student community. He said he would not have struggled as hard as he did in his freshman year if he had made more attempts to integrate into the Black community on campus. Rick, a freshman, mentioned that within the individual schools at Rutgers, “there is not as much diversity of Black people as we may want to see, but the Black people that are here ... know each other. They do try to stick together. ... Most of them motivate each other.” He said that the Black community served as a motivational unit for Black students. As Nigel expressed, “the Black community at Rutgers, we mostly stick to ourselves.” He indicated that some Black students mainly interacted with one another in comparison to their relationship with White peer groups.

However, the students described “Black Rutgers” as being fragmented. They made distinctions and associations based on cultural backgrounds, with a division between “actual African Americans” and other Black groups, particularly the larger population of Nigerians at Rutgers. Lamar explained that this fragmentation was because Black identity is wide ranging. He said, “The culture is very nuanced. And unless you truly grew up in it, you only know fractions of it. I feel like even here you only see fractions of it play out.” He believed that Black students have different backgrounds that speak to their identity, and there was a small amount Black American men from a low socioeconomic status at Rutgers. He saw a specific division

between Black men whose culture was rooted in America versus Black men who had cultural ties outside of the United States. Lamar said, “Certain movies you have to watch to be a part of the community and have discussions. You have to know all the references.” He alluded to the fact that Black American men were aware of these cultural markers as opposed to Black men who had cultural ties outside of the U.S. Joe, another student participant, also shared that there was a divide within the Black student community. He said that the “‘actual’ Black community is segregated. Everything is based on cliques.” Joe believed that “actual Black students” were born in the U.S. and that there were separate sub communities based on the students’ racial and cultural affiliations. He said that the division within Rutgers’ Black student community was apparent by differing student organizations like the West Indian Student Organization (WISO), Black Student Union (BSU), and TWESE, the Organization for African Students & Friends of Africa.

Other students expressed that there were more Nigerians on campus, which made historically African American men feel isolated or different from them. Nigel, who was from a Nigerian background, shared that some African American students had issues with Black men who had a cultural background outside of the U.S. He said, “I feel, Nigerians make up the most [of] Black Rutgers. I have spoken to some African Americans and ... some feel excluded because ... the Africans have kind of taken over.” According to Nigel, historically African American, male students expressed that Nigerian students were more widely represented at Rutgers than they are, which made them feel excluded. Bryan mentioned that this division shaped Black, male students’ social integration. He said, “There are a lot of flaws here in the

Black community at Rutgers ... We [historically African Americans] do have our own events ... they [Nigerians] all have their own separate events.” The students within each Black cultural group appeared to socialize separately, making it difficult to form a single, supportive community. Nigel explained that this division created friction when the Black student community comes together. He said that this was apparent in the Black Student Union because the majority of its members as well as the union’s president were Nigerian in comparison with only two, Black American members. He said:

Some of them [Black students with historically African American backgrounds] had that sentiment that the Africans are kind of taking over a little bit. Kind of just pushing them, the African Americans, to the side, but then we say that is not true at the end of the day. When we discuss this in meetings we have with different organizations, they feel like Africans look down on African Americans.

Nigel explained that historically African American students were seeing more African students represented across the university’s campus, which made them feel as if the African students were outnumbering them. As a result, these men felt as if they did not have a large group of Black students whom they can relate to and belong with. Lamar believed that “actual Black American” students held this belief because their experiences and background was different from Nigerian students. He said:

You are always in the presence of African thought. You really feel excluded almost. ... I closely align myself more heavily with other African Americans because it is that sheer struggle of oppression and marginalization, ... coming through inner city struggles ... fractionalized families ... crime ridden, poverty neighborhoods ... underprivileged schools and feeling like I have to play catch up. If I am struggling and I am venting, and I am stressed out, the last thing I want to talk to is someone that does not understand me.

According to Lamar, historically African American men experienced struggles and challenges that he assumed Nigerian students had not encountered or did not understand. He believed that

these differences created a wedge within the Black student community, which made it not an ideal source of refuge from microaggressions.

Common Ground To Counter Institutional Racism and Microaggressions

It was revealed that the SAS EOF program created a “common ground” for its Black, male students. The program united the students under its umbrella, overshadowing their differing cultural backgrounds and the fragmentation within the Black student community. The students gained a foundation for long lasting friendships due to the shared experiences they had within the program. However the program’s abilities to help its students socially integrate into Rutgers was challenged by its changing demographics, specifically the inclusion of more White students as opposed to African American students.

Uniting the black student community. Although the participants thought that Rutgers’ Black student community was fragmented, they were able to turn to the SAS EOF program for support against microaggressions because the program united all Black men in the program. The participants in this study self identified as having a variety of cultural backgrounds, including: African, African American, African-American Jamaican, Afro-Caribbean, American Black, Biracial, Black, or Nigerian American. Damian noted that there was “actually a lot more African Americans” within the SAS EOF program. Nigel also noted that there are more “actual African Americans” within the SAS EOF program than in the general population of Black men at Rutgers. Jason agreed that SAS EOF program had a greater concentration of historically African Americans. He said, “I think EOF ... tries its hardest to make sure that African Americans are represented here. [They] make sure that we are doing things to put ourselves out there so that we

don't feel like the minority.” Given the demographics, Black men in SAS EOF were able to find and connect with more historically African American men.

Despite the differences in their identities, all of the participants expressed that SAS EOF made them feel connected to one another. Kevin, an SAS EOF alumnus from 2003, shared that there was a tight connection amongst the group of 200 students in his cohort, which included Black men from different cultural backgrounds. He said, “I think seeing a group of Black males in a room together ... is like, ‘Okay, this is something special here.’ Because you do not see a lot of us together, in these types of spaces, under the guise of education and excellence and doing well academically.” He believed that it was uncommon to find a community of Black men who were able to unite because of their shared academic dream. Nigel also believed that SAS EOF united the Black community in order to create a supportive environment. He said:

[The program is] for all Black people, regardless if you are African, African American, or Caribbean. It just creates a common ground and a sense of familiarity ... even though we do come from different places and different experiences. It creates a common ground for everybody. Something that they can identify with or that they wished they could identify with.

Nigel thought that SAS EOF created a common experience for all Black men in the program, and their experiences in the program served as a glue that binds all the men. Carl also believed that Black men’s experiences in SAS EOF overshadowed their cultural discrepancies. He said, “We are unified at the end of the day. Everyone has the same dreams.” He noted that all of the men had the common goal of persisting through degree completion. However, the SAS EOF program united all of the men under the program’s umbrella and enabled them to find support despite their experiences with microaggressions.

Setting the foundation for friendships and belonging. The participants said that the SAS EOF program united all Black men within the program because of their shared upbringing. Their feedback supported information in the literature that pointed to a link between “supportive relationships” and Black males’ success in college (Strayhorn, 2008). Lamar said that he found supportive friendships through SAS EOF because he and his peers have “a sense of shared upbringing...[that brings] a sense of relief that I am not alone here.” He believed that he and his peers had a similar and relatable background that was comforting. Jack believed that without the program he would have missed the opportunity to make his close friendships. He said, “If it was not for EOF, I probably would not like talk to many people, like these guys.” He thought that the experiences he and other Black men had within SAS EOF allowed him to find supportive, Black friends, whom he would not have been able to connect with outside of the program. Kevin, an SAS EOF alumnus from 2003, shared that his “core group of friends were still EOF friends.” He mentioned that “It [SAS EOF] definitely enhanced my experience in a lot of different ways. It gave me a network of friends that were you going through the same experience, that I could rely on. ... The network among peers and like-minded peers was great.” According to Kevin, SAS EOF gave him a peer group whom he trusted and understood his experiences at Rutgers and as a Black man.

The participants also said that their SAS EOF friendships were long lasting. Raymond shared that the friendships with other Black men in the program helped him to feel as if he was not alone in navigating Rutgers. He said:

We always have each others’ back because we did the program itself together. We can rely on each other, even though once the program is over and ... we go to our classes, and

we never see each other. In the end, we are still connected. ... You can reach out to someone. You can trust them the most. Most friendships ... good, best friendships come from EOF itself.

Raymond described having an everlasting bond with his SAS EOF peers. He felt that their connection was long lasting and allowed him and other Black, men to find friends whom they could contact whenever they needed help, such as when they are encounter microaggressions. Jasper said that he found a strong network of friends through the SAS EOF program. He said, “Even my friends that I hang with that are not even at Rutgers anymore or were going here that were older and do not go here now are from EOF.” Jasper indicated that he had support through his SAS EOF friends, regardless of whether they were currently at the university or alumni. He was not alone in socially integrating into Rutgers.

When asked about the importance of having those friendships, the students noted the emotional support and belonging that they got from other Black, male SAS EOF students was unique and not available outside of the program. Lamar said, “They have a community of interconnectivity and of support and of emotional, mental, social support that, you as an African American on campus, do not have. ... It really gives us this space and more so the opportunity to talk about these issues, and I feel like we could not talk [about these issues] anywhere else.” The emotional support and friendships appeared to have helped the students gain a better sense of belonging at Rutgers, despite their experiences with microaggressions and the division within the Black community outside of SAS EOF. Using Tinto’s (1998) framework, we see that the more involved the students are at Rutgers, the better cable they are at persisting through their academic years. University programs, like SAS EOF, that facilitate peer relations were beneficial to the

Black men in the program. Through this study, it was also important to note that representation amongst these peers was a factor. Sharon, a SAS EOF program leader, shared that this sense of belonging was an important indicator of whether Black men stay or leave Rutgers. She said, “When students leave school, it is usually not for reasons of grades, it is usually for feelings of not belonging. Not feeling a sense of community.” According to Sharon, Black, male students needed to feel as if they belonged at Rutgers in order to retain within the university. Nigel expressed similar thoughts. He said, “When I first came to Rutgers, it [SAS EOF] gave me a sense of belonging, like knowing that there was already a group that was willing to accept me.” He pointed to the peer group as helping him along his journey. Joe, another student, shared a similar sentiment. He said, “It makes me feel like I belong. The majority of people, they are a group of people you can relate to.” Joe reiterated the belief that his membership in SAS EOF allowed him to have a group of people who would not judge him, as opposed to the students’ experiences with stereotypical assumptions and microaggressions outside of the program. The participants’ SAS EOF friends helped them to socially navigate their Rutgers experience. As Lamar said:

If you do not go through the program, [and] you just come in, it is so much harder to find people, especially African Americans. ... If you do not know another classmate, if you do not know someone that knows about the stuff, ... you tend to miss out on cultural events. You tend to miss out on organizational events. You tend to miss out on events in the community for students.

Without the SAS EOF program, the students shared that their experience on campus would not be the same, and they would not have been able to successfully socially integrate into the New Brunswick campus.

Shifting demographics and concerns. SAS EOF was limited in its abilities to help Black men to socially integrate into Rutgers because the Black, male community was decreasing within SAS EOF and at Rutgers. Both SAS EOF students and alumni expressed that the program was instrumental in their adjustment as Black men at Rutgers and that they were concerned by the shifting demographics. Kevin said:

The demographics of the EOF program has shifted depending on year to year. If I reflect back on the, the demographics of my EOF program even, I remember at the time I was like, "Wow, talk about people of color. ... the collective of Black males always seems reduced. ... You will see White folks in EOF now.

Kevin indicated that there was now more White students in SAS EOF than Black men, and this was a change from years ago and when he was a student. Mike mentioned that the change in demographics was apparent during the years in which he was a student. He said, "I want to stress that, in particular Black men, we saw that shift in the numbers just dwindling every year. ... I was there ... when it started happening." According to Mike, the population of Black, male students within SAS EOF had been reducing for many years and did not reflect the level of diversity that he and other students were used to. Current students, including Raymond, also noted that there are less Black, male students in SAS EOF. He added that the population of Black men was not only small, but it decreased from years past, mirroring national statistics. Raymond said, "You barely do see it. Like, I remember ... a few years ago, it was like 11%, now it dropped to 7%. ... It is also dropping because of like the cost because I heard Rutgers is going to start becoming more expensive over the years ..." Raymond attributed the rising cost of a Rutgers degree to the smaller number of Black men within SAS EOF, particularly since these

men were coming from a low socioeconomic status.

The SAS EOF staff also took note of the decreasing number of Black men in the program. Jane, a longtime SAS EOF counselor and alumna, confirmed this change. She stated that it was “because the population [at Rutgers] has shifted the percentage of African American male students, that it is a small number.” She believed that the changes in SAS EOF’s demographics were a result of the small percentage of Black men at Rutgers. Fabian, a fellow counselor who graduated from an Educational Opportunity Funded Program outside of Rutgers, explained this further. He said, “There is not a lot of African-Americans, let alone African-American males [at Rutgers]. I think that all that goes with what is happening academically ... [In SAS EOF] you are looking at students that are doing well academically, but they come from low socioeconomic backgrounds.” Fabian suggested that while the SAS EOF program was established in response to the Newark riots, it was a program for all academically strong students from a low socioeconomic backgrounds. He mentioned that if not a lot of Black men remain at Rutgers, it would also be reflected within SAS EOF. The students and alumni highlighted that SAS EOF helped them to socially navigate Rutgers because they were able to find a community of other Black men that understood their challenges with microaggressions and institutional racism. However, as the population of Black men in higher education decreases, Black men in SAS EOF may find that they have less Black peers whom they can connect with.

Conclusion

The study participants shared that Rutgers’ small population of African American men made them feel as if they did not belong within the university. These feelings were supported by

their experiences with microaggressions by White professors and peers. In an attempt to integrate into the university, the participants changed their behaviors to fit a White supremacist ideal and avoid stereotype threat and “spokesperson pressure.” They also sought support from Rutgers’ Black student community because it was assumed that they would find other racially similar students who understood their challenges. However, it was revealed that Rutgers’ Black students community was fragmented. SAS EOF acted as an anti-racist entity by uniting its Black, male students despite their cultural nuances. The students in this study found acceptance through their SAS EOF friends and a better sense of belonging at Rutgers.

While SAS EOF supported the students’ persistence, its shifting demographics, with the introduction of more White than Black students, concerned the participants. This issue did not take away from the positive perceptions of SAS EOF’s work. Instead, the participants’ feedback opened the door for additional inquiry about the ways that SAS EOF is able to support Black, male students’ academic and social integration within Rutgers.

Chapter 6: A Family For Belonging and Cycle of Support

Introduction

In this chapter we explore Rutgers School of Arts and Science's Educational Opportunity Fund (SAS EOF) program's role as fictive kin, or "like family," a term coined by Carol Stack (1974), and how this model aids in the retention of Black, male students Rutgers. We also identify the components of SAS EOF's "like family" dynamic, including its abilities to serve as a second parent, act as a "home away from home," utilize guiding principles, and make sure that SAS EOF staff reflect the diversity of its students. In addition to defining SAS EOF's "like family" components, we further explore the program's attributes that resonate with Black, male students and fuel their perception of belonging at Rutgers. This includes the program staff's emotional and mental support of students, personal touch, and tough love. The students and alumni participants in this study reveal how the "like family" model fuels a cycle of support for incoming cohorts of Black men in the program, which enables Rutgers to retain its Black, male students.

Black Students and Alumni Find Sense of Belonging Through "Like Family" Dynamic

The study participants shared that the SAS EOF served as a "second parent" for them because the program modeled itself as a "home away from home." This environment enabled the students and alumni to find fictive kin, or "like family," who physically represented them and offered them comfort and support in their academic journey. SAS EOF's staff were credited with enabling the program to operate like a second home. The staff even opened their doors to the program's degree non completers and non affiliated, "adopted students." It was revealed that

these efforts were fueled by the staff's guiding principles, their beliefs and values, which personally propelled them to assist their students' integration at Rutgers.

Program served as second parent for students. The majority of the participants in this study shared that Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences Educational Opportunity Fund (SAS EOF) is “like a family” and “a second parent.” SAS EOF students said that this fictive kin or “like family” dynamic helped to give them a better sense of belonging within Rutgers. Jack, an SAS EOF student, said, “It is [SAS EOF] kind of like a second parent.” Joe, another student, also shared this sentiment. He said, “It makes you feel like you have a family academically.” Nigel, a fellow student, agreed with Jack and Joe. He noted that “We are one big family, like we will accept you with open arms.” According to the students, the SAS EOF program was an inclusive family that gave them a better sense of belonging at Rutgers.

This family-like level of comfort and connection was because the students believed that the program had their best intentions in mind and created a never ending bond. Raymond, an SAS EOF student participant, shared that this “one big family” was due to “the connection itself, that no matter what, you will always be EOF til the very end. ... They are going to be your family no matter what. It is like our bond can never be broken.” He explained that this never ending bond allowed him to instantly reconnect and bond with fellow SAS EOF students whom he did not frequently see on campus. Jason, another SAS EOF student, echoed these thoughts, describing the program similarly as the “second parent” description that Jack used. Jason referred to the program as being “like my mom.” According to Jason, he was able to get advice from his counselors that was “more than academic life stuff” and that “the whole organization ...

They are real with me.” Jason likened SAS EOF to a parent that he could comfortably reach out to and confide in because of the program’s family-like aspects.

The SAS EOF program’s “like family” ideal was not only expressed by the students in this study, but also by the program’s alumni. Kevin, a 2003 alumnus, said that he was looking for a professional family, and he got that, and more, through the program. He said:

They [SAS EOF counselors] were approachable. They were friendly, and they were firm. And that approachability, a lot of folks translated and say, "It's like family" because they feel like they are connected to you. They feel like they are relatives. ... So it is like, "Yeah, you relate to me. You are a relative. You are family. It will always be kind of home.”

According to Kevin the SAS EOF program staff set a family-like and approachable tone that made him and other students feel connected and supported at Rutgers. Mike, a 1995 alumnus, also shared similar feedback. He noted that SAS EOF felt like a family to him from the beginning of his time within the program due to the culture created by the staff. He said:

That family-type of atmosphere ... that you can just drop by and talk to a counselor or someone and get some advice on almost anything that you are dealing with as a student at Rutgers. ... A lot of students that were not a part of EOF, they did not have that. ... What I thought was interesting is that although you had a counselor assigned to you, it seemed like all of them were my counselors. ... So you got to experience everybody, not just the person you were assigned to. ... It was just a real good social family network ... a culture that they created that I think should be a model for almost any EOF program.

As with Kevin, 2003 alumnus, Mike, 1995 alumnus, believed that the SAS EOF staff proactively created a welcoming atmosphere in which students could freely connect and converse with any program counselor, thereby creating a larger family-like network.

“Home away from home” and open door assists Black, male students’ persistence.

SAS EOF staff also shared that the program and its members proactively created a “home away

from home” atmosphere that helped Black men in the program get a better sense of belonging at Rutgers. Jane, a longtime SAS EOF counselor and alumna, said that “this should feel like your home away from home. ... It is where you felt comfortable when everything was crazy.” Based on Jane’s response, it was apparent that the program’s “home away from home” environment was cultivated by the program’s staff. Laura, a counselor and Rutgers SAS EOF alumna, confirmed this assumption by freely referring to the SAS EOF program as “an extraordinary family,” a phrase she said that she frequently expressed to everyone.

Wilson, another counselor, shared that the program’s ability to feel like a “home away from home” was seen in the presence of former students and SAS EOF degree non completers who continued to reach out and stay connected to him. He said, “They may not have completed the program due to academics. ... [but] once they become an EOF student, they are always an EOF student.” He willingly maintained relations with students who did not complete their degrees because they were still considered as belonging to the SAS EOF family. The program remained their home. Sharon, an SAS EOF leader, explained this further. She said that the program was geared at making all students aware that “this is your home away from home,” echoing Jane’s statement. Sharon added that she told degree non completers:

As soon as you are in a position where you are ready to come back, contact your counselor again, we will get you situated. Even if students come back years later and they no longer qualify for EOF because they have been out in the working world, we say, “Once EOF, always EOF,” so we will still provide them with the counseling support and everything else that we offer, minus the EOF grant, because now they are either no longer eligible or they might not need it. ... So, we are also concerned about that because the reality of our students’ lives is ... many of them come so close to finishing and then they have to leave.

Sharon stressed that SAS EOF's "home away from home" policy encouraged non completers to return to the university, while allowing students to know that they would always be supported by the program.

The SAS EOF program staff were aware that Black, male students' retention was a university-wide issue, which is why they freely welcomed all students outside of the program, including Black men, to benefit from their services. The staff coined these students as "adopted students," a family-type concept. Laura, a counselor and Rutgers SAS EOF alumna, explained that counselors maintained an open-door policy for students who were not officially members of the program. She said, "I have my little adopted students who [are] ... friend of a friend. Our director encourages us [to] ... tell students, 'Hey, if you see a student who ... wants an EOF counselor, send them to me, and I'll assign them.' " The SAS EOF program leaders encouraged the counselors to support any student who reached out to them for assistance. With this open-door policy, any Black, male student who was aware of SAS EOF or had a friend who is a member of the program was welcomed to get support from the staff.

Wilson gave additional insight into this level of support and the extended family membership of Black men who were "adopted students." He said, "Because, we have many students that we pick up, that we consider adopted students, which are students who are not necessarily a part of the program due to financial situations or things like that, ... [We make] sure that they know that they have a place to go for support, and we will always give them the best information necessary to make sure that they are being helped and feeling comfortable and supported." The counselors knew that all students, including Black men, may have needed SAS

EOF's resources, so they had a shared willingness to position themselves as an all-inclusive, supportive family. This was not only in line with one of Tinto (1998)'s theory that the ability to fit within the university environment was associated with student departure, but it was also another way in which the "like family" created closeness amongst its members. The counselors took on the role of helping Black, male students to find that fit within Rutgers.

Guiding principles fuel "like family" for Black men. When exploring the formation of the SAS EOF program's "like family" dynamics and views on Black men's retention, the SAS EOF staff each stated that the program's supportive environment was tied to their own guiding principles, also known as their beliefs and values, that drove them towards supporting their students. Sharon, an SAS EOF program leader, shared that "had EOF existed in my parents' generation, they both would have absolutely qualified. They are both first generation to go to college." Sharon grew up being told that education was the key to opportunity because her grandparents immigrated to the United States to escape religious persecution for being Jewish and used their education to create a new life for her family. Through these lessons, she was able to understand the participants' issues with discrimination, and she worked closely with them to inform them about the power of higher education. She said:

My guiding principle is the world is possible for you, so a lot of our students come in, and they are already a bit defeated when they enter because it is like, "I was told I cannot do this," or "I really want to do this, but I am not sure I will be able to." My feeling is always, you never know if you do not try. ... I get the biggest thrill of anyone in this program of watching them succeed, so I would hope if they came in and they were experiencing institutional racism, which I believe 100% continues to exist, [they would feel supported]."

Sharon believed she understood Black male students' struggles with institutional racism and

retention, which is why she wanted to help them to complete their degrees. Fabian, a counselor who participated in an Educational Opportunity Funded Program outside of Rutgers, shared that his guiding principle was to “look out for my people.” He said, “You know, I want what I did not have. I want to be able to pay it forward as well.” He positioned himself within the SAS EOF family, so he could help Black men in the ways in which he never had. Laura, another counselor and program alumna, also shared a similar sentiment. She said, “I wanted to do social work or something where I can give back to my community. ... My goal is to make it, so that students understand that they belong. You can make mistakes. You can cry in my office. You can talk to me about reality shows.” Laura was clearly maintaining an open environment that was not restricted to academic advisement but more “like family.” Her guiding principles and actions were to make the program more accessible and family-oriented to students.

Wilson, a fellow counselor, also shared the same thoughts as Sharon and Laura. He believed so deeply in the success of Black men in that program that he actively supported Men of Color both within and outside of the SAS EOF program. He said:

My goals ... would be to definitely continue, if not strengthen, the connection between students and the institution here, at Rutgers. I try to be again, very transparent, and very open to some of things that they may encounter. ... Being that I am a Black male, I have been, along with [a senior program leader], trying to do a men's group. And, it has become like a safe space for those young men to feel as though they can address any needs or any issues that they may have, dealing with anything financially, anything personally, anything academically, and knowing that they have Men of Color who are here to help them. ... Each student may or may not have a different experience with the institutional racism. ... But, you just want to make sure that they are ... aware of its existence, so that they are not blindsided ... nor they fall victim to it in any way.”

Wilson’s guiding principle was linked to bringing greater awareness about Black men’s experiences with institutional racism and how to navigate it. Through SAS EOF, he was helping

the men in the program to overcome institutional racism in order to socially and academically integrate into Rutgers.

Representation in “like family” assists retention. SAS EOF’s “like-family” model helped Black, male students in the program because representation was proven to be a critical component that helped the students to feel as if they belong within Rutgers and as members of the SAS EOF program. As a result, the demographics of the SAS EOF staff purposefully mirrored the demographics of the students in the program. Sharon said:

Race related to gender ... I want to have both available, not that we necessarily push it. ... I want to have African-American male and female counselors. ... We are all different. I don't want this to be a cookie cutter version of [me]. I do not want it to be a cookie cutter of anyone. We need the different voices. I want young. I want old. I want Black. I want White. I want people who might be heterosexual. I want people who might be gay or lesbian. I want the whole mix.

Sharon said that she maintained a diverse staff whenever possible, so there was a variety of racial and cultural representation available to all students. She believed that this added a level of comfort and belonging for Black men in the program. Sharon also said that this effort was in response to the students’ requests for counselors that reflected them, particularly the requests by African American, male students. She recalled an incident in which a Black, male student was assigned a Black, female counselor then requested a switch to a Black, male counselor. She said that the student thought that his Black, female counselor was great, but he wanted someone whom he thought he could relate to. She said, “He wrote to me, and he said, ‘I have never had a strong Black, male role model in my life. I am wondering if he could be my counselor.’ And the answer is, ‘Of course.’ If it is going to give someone that added level of comfort and connection, why not?” Based on her response, it was clear that she was aware of Black, male students’ needs

and enabled the program to facilitate these requests as needed in order to help them feel as if they belonged at Rutgers. Fabian reiterated Sharon's feedback, noting that the program allowed students to see themselves in the staff, which enhanced their family-like connection. He said:

So you have a nice rich pool of diversity, and who you want to get acquainted with, who you feel you will vibe well with versus those you will not. We definitely have people who are Non-People of Color. We have a few counselors that are Caucasian, and we do have a large, African-American staff and a few Latinos. ... When our students see us, we look like them. ... I think they are going to want to gel and connect with folks that they feel they can identify with.

The SAS EOF staff believed that their diversity added another layer of comfort and support for all students, including Black men in the program.

When asked if and how race shaped these relationships, the students mentioned that having Black SAS EOF staff members provided them with role models. Jason said, "I mean, it is usually just good to be around because you just see these people in positions of power, and you are just like, 'This is where I wanna be.' ... I look at Wilson [a program counselor] as like a role model because he is somewhere everybody is just trying to be." Jason expressed that having Black people represented as SAS EOF staff allowed him to feel as if he belonged within the program and university. Kevin, an SAS EOF alumnus from 2003, shared that having Black counselors on staff allowed him and other students to have role models. He said, "I will always remember hearing a lot of students saying, 'Oh, I want to be a counselor because I want to be like so and so. I want to do what they have done to, what they have been able to do for me.'"

The staff gave them examples of a higher level of achievement. Nigel also shared similar thoughts about the program, noting that his counselor also provided examples of Black male, program alumni to motivate him and other students. He recalled the first time in which he

entered his counselor's office and said, "I look around [his] office. I see graduation pictures over the years, and I see a lot of Black men in those photos. ... It was great." SAS EOF counselors were not only positive and diverse representatives, but they also presented Black, male students with examples of alumni role models.

Sharon explained that a diverse staff served as a powerful force for Black male students' persistence. She said, "Role models are really powerful, so the more Black men we get through this program, the more alumni mentors and role models that are here for our students, so I love it. ... Sure, anyone could teach and convey information, but seeing a role model like that inspires hope and possibility." Having role models in the SAS EOF's "family" and a "home away from home" offered Black men in the program hope of their own achievement.

"Like Family" Creates Key Connections For Black, Male Students' Persistence

Historically, fictive kin, or "like family," relations helped to support African Americans by granting them cultural and social capital (Whitney, 2016). In the case of Black men in the SAS EOF, the program's family-like environment included counselors who not only mirror the students population, but they also connected students with much-needed resources within and outside of the program. Raymond, an SAS EOF student, said, "Your counselors are your number one point of contact. In the end, you do listen to them because they do have your back ... because they want you to graduate and succeed." He believed that the counselors offered extra support and connections because they genuinely cared about Black, male students' success.

Julian agreed with Raymond and mentioned that through the counselors, he and other students gained access to information that Black men outside of the program may not have been

aware of. He said, “Other areas and groups like Black Men’s Collective and SSS [Student Support Services]. EOF introduced us to those things. Common knowledge to us is not to the general public.” The students were able to connect with other peer groups outside of SAS EOF because of the information shared by their counselors. Travis also explained that the staff pointed them in the direction of additional opportunities, thereby helping him and other Black men to integrate into the university. He said, “Our counselors, even though they like do not hold our hands through the whole process, they let us know about opportunities that we can take so that we can get a step further once the semester gets started.” According to his account, the counselors once again helped students to get a “head start” by linking them to the resources they need.

Larry, an alumnus from 2006, reiterated that SAS EOF helped students to make key connections. He said, “I know ... resources existed through my connection with [my] EOF family. ... Tutoring, that was a big one for me. I did not get counseling through EOF, but my counselor referred me to a counselor.” The SAS EOF program successfully connected Black men to the specific resources that they needed for many years. The program worked as a family that not only made the students feel as if they belonged within Rutgers, but it also connected them to resources that they would not know were available to them. This was similar to the program’s ability to help Black men to “catch up” academically. Instead, SAS EOF helped Black men in this study to “catch up” on their connections. These actions were in line with Tinto’s (1975) theory on student retention, which stated that the more peer interactions and academic supports that a student receives, the more likely that the student will persist to degree

completion. The SAS EOF program's support helped Black men in the program to successfully persist towards earning their academic degrees.

The SAS EOF staff shared that they proactively created opportunities and directed Black men in the program to resources that helped them to navigate their on-campus experience. Sharon said that it was an effort that the staff took on, so the students knew how to get started. She said, "We feel very strongly [about this]. We do not need to recreate excellent work that is already being done. We have University Career Services, academic departments ... Latino and Caribbean Studies, or Computer Science ... and we are going to help make those connections." She explained that whenever the program cannot assist students, they were able to point students to other sources across the university. Laura, a counselor and Rutgers SAS EOF alumna, shared that these connections helped to close gaps for Black men in the programs. She said, "I think our strengths are definitely our ability to provide support, and to help bridge the gap with resources." She believed that the program was a connective bridge to other resources on campus for students. Wilson, another counselor, agreed. He noted that he actively drew from his own experience and familiarity with Greek life to help other Black men in the program who were interested in joining a fraternity. He said, "All of the counselors know that I am very much affiliated with the Greek life, so they will send the student to talk to me, which allows me to get them connected to some of the Greek life organizations that are here, where they may not have necessarily known where to turn to or even how to start or go about it to begin with." Through his actions, Wilson was able to pass along the support and information that he said was missing from his own experience as a Black man in higher education.

“Like Family” Provides Black Men With Emotional and Mental Support

It was found that SAS EOF’s counselors helped to shape the program’s “like family” environment because they provided their Black, male students with emotional support similar to a second family. This included encouraging and reassuring the students of their abilities to earn an undergraduate degree. The counselors also served as a source for mental health support in the event that these men needed personal counseling or a means of connecting with a licensed psychologist. The study participants viewed the counselors’ approach as embodying a parental-like, personal touch because the counselors acted and viewed their services as being “beyond just a job.” The students described this approach as being much-needed, tough love that pushed them to do well, which once again embodied a “like family” approach to helping SAS EOF’s Black, male students.

SAS EOF serves as an emotional support system. The SAS EOF program used its “like family” model to not only connect students to resources, but it also gave them an emotional support system that was missing from their on-campus experience. Larry, an alumnus from 2006, shared that he did not have this level of emotional support from the staff prior to the program because he came from a tough background. He said, “You are not going to tell anybody that you do not know what is going on with you. ... Even if you are struggling at this point, you do not show it. You are going to keep it moving ... keep on pushing.” Larry explained that he appreciated the ability to emotionally connect with his SAS EOF family because it freed him to share his struggles as an undergraduate. Kevin, an SAS EOF alumnus from 2003, shared Larry’s opinions. He described the program staff’s emotional assistance as parental. Kevin said:

Once they had a sense of where you were going academically, they became more, um, more socially concerned about how you doing overall, your eating. Are you sleeping? Are you taking care of yourself? That kind of leaned more towards ... like a father figure or a family member because it was not just always business. It was like, "How are you doing as a person?"

Kevin expressed that the counselors and staff were “like parents” to the students because they were able to emotionally connect with them.

Where Kevin honed in on SAS EOF’s parent-like support, Jason, an SAS EOF student, noted that students were able to gain reassurance from their “like family.” He said, “I think the best feeling to describe everything would be reassurance that you can do it even if you thought you could not.” He said that that the staff helped to fuel his persistence towards earning a college degree. Nigel, a fellow student, also shared this belief. He said:

Just words of encouragement [helped me] because during that time I felt like maybe I am not good enough to go to Rutgers, maybe I am not smart enough for here ... maybe I should have chose to go to another, smaller school ... She [my counselor] kept telling me that she believes in me and not to give up. Just continued words of encouragement during our meetings. She would always ask how I did on my exams, how is my family doing, so she was really there for me.

While serving as a family unit, SAS EOF counselors gave students like Nigel, Kevin, and Larry a means of encouragement and “parental-like” care. The counselors asked questions about the students’ emotional well-being and blood-related families. Kevin also shared that “the biggest thing was the confidence and excitement about education.” This confidence enabled him to keep persisting. Laura, a counselor and Rutgers SAS EOF alumna, confirmed this belief. She said:

I just keep telling them and trying to rebuild their confidence. Some of them have had it really rough ... They never thought they were actually going to get into Rutgers. Their guidance counselors did not even help them because they did not think they could ... and some of their families. It can be really difficult, so I really do try to be that one less voice

saying no.

According to Laura, she and other counselors were aware that Black men in the program may have lacked enough confidence and support from home to remain motivated to stay at Rutgers, so she and her fellow counselors made it their prerogative to help build this up for the students.

SAS EOF serves as a mental support system. In addition to providing Black male, students with emotional support, the SAS EOF family-like environment helped students in need of mental health. Wilson, an SAS EOF counselor, shared, “It is not just the academic piece. It can sometimes turn into a counseling piece ... where they [students] may have some personal things going on in their lives.” According to Wilson, the counselors went above their parental-like roles to become a means of enhancing students’ mental wellness.

Abe and other students supported this claim. He said, “Personally, without EOF, I feel I would probably go insane ... and probably fail. I would feel like I am doing this by myself, alone, nobody to support me at all.” Without his counselor’s support, Abe believed that he would have dropped out of Rutgers because his blood-related family was “far away... They are not going through the process with you.” This appeared to be different from the family found in SAS EOF, which understood the challenges he was facing as a Black, male student at Rutgers. Jason agreed with Abe’s claim and shared that he was able to “get help, even just mental.” He said, “If you need somebody to talk to, there is always somebody to talk to.” There was always an SAS EOF staff member on hand to help him and other students with mental health needs in some way, even if it was to point them to professional resources.

Wilson and other SAS EOF counselors agreed with this statement. He said, “Some of the

main concerns that I have come across are students ... not knowing where to turn to for things that we help them with in EOF, as far as the resources are concerned, where to go to if they have issues such as ... mental illnesses.” Laura, a counselor and Rutgers SAS EOF alumna, shared similar feedback. She believed that the mental health struggles for some Black men are unique in comparison to other students. She said:

Mental health issues are definitely something that they struggle with. And I think all students struggle with that, but for Black men on campus it is different because not many of them know how to put a name, they do not know how to talk about it, or put the language to it ... or are not really necessarily open to it. ... I cannot necessarily say that it is not the same for other Men of Color, but I definitely know that the Black men that I know ... They are depressed. They are stressed. They have got anxiety.

Laura explained that some Black men in the program needed help with addressing their mental health, but they may not have known how to diagnose the problem because they were unfamiliar with managing these issues. This was where the counselors stepped in as a resource as well as another means for students to receive mental health assistance. Laura explained this further. She said, “We really do a lot of personal counseling because you [students] cannot be focused on your academics if you are worried about mom being put out, or if you are worried about your grandpop who just passed away.” She stated that without the SAS EOF counselors’ assistance, Black men in the program were challenged with academically performing well in the face of tough mental and emotional issues.

Sharon, SAS EOF program leader, also mentioned that some students may have been facing mental health issues that challenged their persistence and that the program attempted to help them. She explained that these students may not feel comfortable seeking help outside of the SAS EOF program. She said, “A lot of our students, particularly our Men of Color, have

experienced a lot of mental health challenges, but they did not feel comfortable going to the counseling center.” As a result of this discomfort, Sharon and other staff connected with and brought in counselors from Rutgers’ counseling center to assist these students. She said:

Primarily, we refer our African-American men [to an African American male counselor] because he is a licensed psychologist, so he has all the credentials. He contracts with us ... because when things are going on in someone's life, and it is not letting them focus on being a student, and it really goes beyond the issues that the [SAS EOF] counselors are dealing with, are really some deep-seeded issues ... We want them to get some assistance.

The SAS EOF staff made it a point to provide Black, male students with access to a Black, male counselor in the event that they needed a representation of themselves in order to find comfort in seeking help. Through these actions, the SAS EOF family connected and adapted their support in whatever ways necessary in order to help Black men in the program gain academic and emotional support.

Family-like appeal is shaped by personal touch and tough love. In addition to the provision of emotional and mental health support, the “family-like” appeal of the SAS EOF was credited with the “personal touch” that the staff provided Black, male students in the program. Sharon shared that her work was “beyond just a job.” She said, “It is really just my lifestyle, so you could email me at night or when I'm on vacation. It is going to be the same response. I want when our students meet with a counselor, that counselor is there for them. It is like the rest of the world goes away. Their phone goes on do not disturb.” Sharon encouraged her staff to go beyond just supporting students as a job. Instead, they needed to be available and willing to help the students, as a parent would.

Jane, a longtime SAS EOF counselor and alumna, incorporated her personal touch by

offering an open-door policy to students. She said:

I think it is important to really be there for the students. My EOF counselor was [and had a] very kind of open-door policy. ... [I tell them] please do not call me your guidance counselor. I am much more than that. I tell them, "This is a relationship we are building." ... I tell them, "The trust begins today." My favorite are the ones that say, "Can I get a hug?" I am like, "Ah!" I love hugs.

Jane made it known to the students that she was always available and willing to give them hugs as needed, extending herself past her professional role to a more parental role of caring for the students. Like Jane, Laura also noted that she "goes the extra mile to make sure that the students are taken care of."

The students and alumni expressed that their experiences with the SAS EOF staff's personal approach helped them to gain a better sense of belonging at Rutgers despite their challenges with institutional racism and microaggressions. Jack said, "You can be more casual. You can drop by anytime. They are your advisor but also kind of like your friend. You do not always have to go in there with something. You just go to really hang out, if you want. I kind of like that." Jack appreciated the informal interactions and his ability to easily converse with his counselor. He also shared that the counselor's willingness to "go the extra mile" helped him and the other men in the program to have the same overall support and preparation as other students. Jack said:

Just by making sure that we do not have less than everyone else. Textbooks, calculators, notebooks. Things that the everyday student needs that more people might have more access to. They make sure that we get just as much access to that, just like everybody else. ... [They] make sure that we are on the same playing field as everybody else and that we not handicapping ourself with our like mindsets.

According to Jason, the counselors helped him and other Black, male students in the program to

gain resources and feel up the par with other students at Rutgers. Similarly, Jack and Abe shared examples of times when their counselors acted as parents by checking up on whether they ate and providing snacks for them. For the students, SAS EOF became a safety net in the face of the obstacles they were facing as Black men at a PWI.

The alumni in this study also recalled this parental-like support. Patrick, an alumnus from 1978, said, "It definitely is a vital part of my college experience ... the Deans, the people, the academic advisors, the secretary ... They really cared about the students. You know, they really did care. And I was blessed to be a part of it." He stressed that their level of care was instrumental in his socially integration, during a time in which there were not as many Black, male students on campus. Larry, an alumnus from 2006, also shared that he and his counselor were able to have "HDR: heavy, deep, and real sessions." He explained, "She used her life as a backdrop to help me manage somethings. She would be like, 'You know, I had to navigate this. I'm the only one who went to college, and my mother expects me to do this too. But look, this is what you have to do.' " Larry said that those relatable discussions helped him to navigate his experiences because his counselor consoled him as a parent would.

Other students, including Damian and Jason, described the counselors' abilities to "go the extra mile" and help them as being "tough love." Damian said:

The strengths are definitely in their tough love. Basically directors and counselors [are] all about tough love, and that's valuable. ... Not just babying, telling you, "you have to do this. ... It is up to you ... You are an adult." ... I have to do everything on my own ... If you want it, no one is going to do it for you. Being Black male, urban, poor, I feel like tough love is what is going to get me through college because this is a PWI, first of all.

Damian linked the need to gain tough love as fitting the tough lifestyle in which he was raised

and his experiences at a PWI, like Rutgers. Jason also described the staff's approach as being a form of "tough love," but he believed that this was more along the lines of constructive criticism. He said, "There's nothing else to describe it but tough love. And most people do not want to deal with constructive criticism, but the counselors are real good for that. That helps you out in the long run, so I appreciate it." Raymond explained that this form of loving relations was helpful for him and the other men in the program. He said, "They are here to help and support you and make sure you graduate on time, but they cannot baby you. That's the thing." He linked the "tough love" as a way of supporting Black, male students, so they could persist through degree completion.

The program's graduates also shared similar beliefs. Larry, an alumnus from 2006, said that the counselors' "tough love" helped him as he vacillated between doubting his abilities and wanting to quit school and believing that he could earn a degree. He said, "It was like helplessness ... How can I make it? How can I make more money to make ends meet? How can I stay up with my studying? ... She [his counselor] just responded with a lot of care. Like, my mom, she is really hard." Larry drew an affiliation between his blood-related mother and his counselor. He highlighted the ways in which students and alumni positively viewed the program's staff as family members. Sharon clarified the counselor-student family relationship even further. She said:

And because of the way we get to know our students, it really just creates this great synergy and bonding to, to work at all levels. So if a student comes in and they are struggling for a semester, it opens the door to have the conversation. "What is contributing to your difficulty? What has been going on in your life this semester? What are the challenges? How are you trying to balance being a student and whatever they might present as one of those challenges?"

As Sharon clarified, those “tough love” conversations and questions were what helped Black men in the program to open up to their counselors and receive the support they needed to academically and socially integrate into Rutgers.

Cycle of Support Fuels “Like Family”

SAS EOF alumni shared that they remained connected to their “like family” by serving as guest speakers and mentors to the students, particularly Black men. They expressed a satisfaction with their experience and need to “pay homage to the program” by giving back to the students. They also shared the students’ belief that the program could be strengthened by enabling current students to formally support their younger cohort as peer mentors. The participants believed that this would better fuel the cycle of support that the “like family” had.

Black, male alumni give back, continue cycle of support. Part of the SAS EOF program’s family-like aspect was the cycle of giving back to students in the program. This was apparent in the fact that three out of the four counselors in this study were alumni of EOF programs and believed that “giving back” is part of their guiding principle. Many alumni stayed connected with the program’s staff and their peers, while also assisting students as role models. Kevin, an SAS EOF alumnus from 2003, explained that he was “involved in the program pretty much from the start.” He said:

Because of the EOF program, I succeeded really well on my first semester. So, I immediately got involved in and connected with [the program leaders]. I felt like I wanted to give back to EOF, I felt like maybe they did not realize that they gave me too much. I probably owe them something ... They bring you in. They feed you. They take care of you. They pay you money. They are just like, “Just get good grades. That's all you need.”

Kevin felt an overwhelming gratitude for the support that SAS EOF provided, which led him to want to return the same amount of support to incoming SAS EOF students, particularly Black men in the program. After his first year in the program, he went on to become a resident advisor for the Summer Institute for the following five years. He shared that those connections and abilities to give back to later cohorts of Black men were strengths of the program. He said, “It is a really great social and family-type atmosphere. It is a connection that far exceeds graduations.” He believed that it was important for him and other alumni to maintain the SAS EOF family connection, thereby aiding in Black men’s retention.

Similar to Kevin, Larry, an SAS EOF alumnus from 2006, also returned to “pay homage to the program.” He served as a speaker because he “just did everything EOF. I loved EOF.” As with Kevin and Larry, Mike, an SAS EOF alumnus from 1995, also shared that he started to become involved in the program because he was also fortunate to have had SAS EOF’s assistance in his degree completion. He said, “It was just a family. Had I not had been a part of that EOF, I do not know what my college experience would of been like.” Mike shared his gratitude for the program staff and explained that he gave back to the students by working for SAS EOF as a peer advisor. He also worked with high schools to recruit students into the program, was active in raising money to fund the program, and attempted to organize a program for Black students seeking entry into STEM fields. Mike described it as “a recycling effect” in which he was able to pass along his assistance to later cohorts, who could benefit from the program as much as he did.

Another critical way in which African American alumni contributed to the SAS EOF

program and its cycle of giving was through the program's annual Alumni Career Day. Laura explained that it was an event in which 30 to 40 alumni who worked in a variety of industries returned to Rutgers to mentor the students, serve as representatives from similar hometowns and backgrounds, and share their own struggles to academically and socially integrate into the university. The students also received a group mentoring session as part of the event. Laura said:

They can have a chance to talk to them about their academic difficulties because a lot of our alumni ... will willingly admit that they did not do so well in undergrad their first two or three years. Recently at our conference, a guy came, and he said, "I had a 1.7 GPA, and I have got a Ph.D. now."

Laura explained that alumni' stories, chronicling their own obstacles and abilities to persist through college and earn degrees, were motivational to Black, male students who attended the Alumni Career Day.

SAS EOF students in this study noted that the Alumni Career Day did help them in their desire to earn a degree. Damian recalled meeting a Black, female alumna who deeply inspired him. He said:

She went on to do graduate research at the University of Chicago after graduating here with her undergrad, and she just was so inspirational. A Black woman studying physics—that just blew my mind. I was like, "Oh, my gosh." And she was doing it. She was telling us all these stories about how people mistake her for not being a physics professor and stuff. It just inspired me.

Damian was able to see possibilities for his own aspirations because he was able to meet a successful Black, female SAS EOF alumna. He was able to meet someone who was African American and able to earn an advanced degree, a level of representation that he did not see before the Alumni Career Day. Jason also expressed similar opinions about the alumni. He

found comfort in learning about the alumni's struggles and abilities to overcome them. Jason said, "I feel like the stories and the feedback that they give about their experience just always helps me to be at ease, knowing that just in case I'm not doing this well, that somebody else got there not being perfect. Like no one is perfect. That is what that shows me." Jason also shared that the African American alumni helped him to make progress, enabling him to know that he could persist and reach his academic goals.

SAS EOF alumni in this study shared that they were aware of the positive impact that they were making on Black men during the Alumni Career Day. Kevin, an SAS EOF alumnus from 2003, stated that it was a defining moment for some students. He said:

This is because for some of them ...[They] just saw, for the first time, a Black female lawyer that graduated from Rutgers who was an EOF student and was from Paterson. ... It gives them that boost. It gives them that encouragement to say, "Keep going." Someone that has gone through what you have gone through, and they are sitting in front of you in the career that you want to be in. I have definitely seen it for students that are really interested and engaged. They are like, "This is one of those moments that is going to define my next step."

Kevin explained that when Black men in the program interacted with SAS EOF alumni during the Career Day, it became a defining and motivational moment. Kevin and Mike, an SAS EOF alumnus from 1995, explained that they gave back to SAS EOF because they wanted to show the students "faces that certainly look like them that are professionals, that are working." They both explained that they were giving Black men examples of what life looks like after Rutgers and that there was a network that extended beyond the university.

Sharon used the event as an opportunity to connect students with alumni, so they could further facilitate the cycle of support. She explained:

Whatever it might be, we put them in touch that way. It has been the case where our alums have offered current students internship opportunities. They have served as mentors. They have helped guide them and shared their experiences. So the more Black men we get through this program, the more alumni mentors and role models are here for our students, so I love it.

The cycle of giving back within the SAS EOF program was something that the alumni felt propelled to do for current SAS EOF students. It was also well received and helped Black men in the program to gain a better sense of belonging and persistence at Rutgers.

Cycle of support is limited for Black, male students. In addition to the alumni, the SAS EOF students in this study expressed a willingness to give back to younger students in the program. However, they did not believe that there were enough systems setup to help them to contribute to this cycle of giving. Damian shared that he served as a student speaker on the last day of the Summer Institute, a culmination ceremony. While he found satisfaction in giving back through his speech, he desired additional opportunities to help his peers. He said, “Every generation needs to get stronger. I was thinking about volunteering at my high school, talking more about EOF, advocating for EOF.” He would like to help students to enter Rutgers and persist as he has done. Lamar also expressed the same thoughts. He said, “I wish we had more places where we could sit down and give advice to first years and talk to second years and people in all grade levels about ‘hey man, like, this is tough. This really is.’” Lamar highlighted the need to create more opportunities for Black, male students to pass along their knowledge to the younger cohorts.

Larry, an alumnus from 2006, expressed that formal peer mentorship was missing from his experience in the program. He said, “To do it over again, I would have some type of

mentoring, where I'd pair an upperclassman with a younger classmen, and I would attach some type of money to that experience. [SAS EOF] would then pay an extra \$500 if you met once a month.” Larry recommended that the program pay students to mentor one another in order to further help their peers, while enabling them to obtain much-needed financial support.

The students and alumni mentioned that formal peer mentorship was needed, despite the fact that Black men in the SAS EOF program already had a life-long, “like family” environment, because the students became less connected following the Summer Institute. Jane, a longtime SAS EOF counselor and alumna, also shared these thoughts. She said, “We are hands on from the beginning, pretty much. The tricky part is keeping them engaged in the program once the first semester is over.” She noted that after the first semester students became more involved in their academic and social experience and did not have the long-term, day-to-day commitment that they experienced during the Summer Institute. Jane’s opinion was backed by Lamar, a student. He said that he felt less connected with SAS EOF after his first year. He said:

I feel like after the first year, you are not really connected with your incoming class of EOF students as much. You are only connected with those that you build bonds with, whether that is in your classes or the ones that you see most often. I feel like having maintained that community or outside of what the students do is pretty tough.

Lamar believed that he and other students would benefit from greater, formal efforts to maintain the peer group dynamic. Kevin, an alumnus from the class of 2003, also noted that it was tougher to make the students come together as a tight, cohesive group after the first academic year. He said:

It is a challenge to maintain that kind of group dynamic and that cohort dynamic outside of the summer program when it was just that isolation of just folks working together. The first year is always a strong dynamic between students and counselors. Then by the

time students get to their sophomore, junior year, they have their identity, their place on campus. They have a sense of how to navigate college.

He, along with Lamar and Jane, questioned how the SAS EOF program could sustain the same level of excitement and engagement that students had during the Summer Institute. Regardless, all participants expressed that the strengths of the program outweighed these weaknesses, and the “like family” aspects of SAS EOF helped Black men in the program to persist through degree completion.

Conclusion

The majority of the participants in this study expressed that SAS EOF served as fictive kin, or “like family,” to its members. This was evident by the familial terminologies and references that its members used to describe one another, including “family,” “second parent,” “like my mom,” “home away from home,” and “adopted students.” SAS EOF staff proactively created as “home away from home” for its Black, male students who were seeking refuge from the financial, personal, and academic challenges they brought into the university as well as the experiences with microaggressions that they found within their on-campus experience. The counselors were viewed as “second parents” because they incorporated a personal touch, tough love, and open-door policy for any student or degree non completer, which shaped the program’s welcoming environment. Through its efforts, the program enabled Black, male students to overcome their emotional and mental stressors and become indoctrinated into a cycle of support, where they can give back to students as alumni. However, the participants expressed that this cycle is limited because the program lacked a formal means for Black, male students to contribute and help their younger peers to academically and socially integrate into Rutgers. It

was assumed that if SAS EOF established a peer mentorship initiative, the students would have an improved chance of persisting through their academic years.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this chapter, I summarize my conclusions and reflect on the study findings to highlight the attributes of the Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences Educational Opportunity Fund (SAS EOF) program that help Black, male students to academically and socially integrate into Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. I also highlight this study's implications for research, practice, and policy. I identify the limitations of my research in order to consider how these limitations might be addressed during the replication or continuation of this work. It is my hope that these findings will assist in increasing the population of Black men who earn university degrees, while underscoring the need to address microaggressions and universities' legacies of institutional racism.

Reflections on Findings

This study recognized the gap in degree attainment between African American men and White males at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), which is echoed at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. My research provided a detailed evaluation of School of Arts and Sciences Educational Opportunity Fund (SAS EOF)'s ability to mediate the issues surrounding Black male, students' retention. When assessing the data, I found that Black men in the SAS EOF program aspired to earn their undergraduate degrees, but they were curtailed by several factors within and outside of the Rutgers.

I discovered, through my analysis of conversations with the study participants about their experiences with SAS EOF, that the program gave them a better sense of belonging at Rutgers, thereby facilitating their retention. SAS EOF was successful in supporting Black, male students

because the program countered the many challenges that these students brought with them into the university, including their struggles working and attending school in order to afford their education and support their families at home, experiences with racist and negative assumptions about their academic abilities, and beliefs that they needed to “catch up” to the academic performance level of White students from a higher socioeconomic status.

I was surprised to find that the challenges the students brought with them into Rutgers had such a major influence on their retention, as I had assumed that the students’ experiences would be mainly shaped by their on-campus encounters. I also discovered that SAS EOF staff members were aware that their Black, male students struggle with these additional stressors, so they proactively addressed these issues formally and informally by contributing to students’ finances, motivating them, and providing ways for them to get a “head start” on their academics. These means of support suggested that SAS EOF worked as a bridge to close the students’ financial, personal, and academic gaps.

My research also highlighted how SAS EOF offered its Black, male students a way to connect and cultivate supportive friendships with other Black students. The participants shared that they were interested in seeking racially similar peers because these friends would understand their experiences with microaggressions, “spokesperson pressure,” and stereotype threats. However, the SAS EOF students had difficulties acquiring those friends due to divisions within Rutgers’ Black student community. I discovered that SAS EOF united the Black students within its program through their shared experiences in the program, making it a supportive hub for increasing their self-esteem, motivation, and finding acceptance. As a result, the program acted

as an anti-racist entity. It created a safe space for these men to counter their experiences with microaggressions and racist assumptions about their abilities.

As a Rutgers undergraduate alumna from 2002, I was aware that Black students at the university may view “Black Rutgers” as fragmented, but I was unaware that this belief was still present today. I was also unaware that the Black student community’s fragmentation would have a big impact on Black, male students’ experiences. This study found that being under the SAS EOF umbrella united the study participants and fueled their persistence.

In addition to these findings, my study revealed that the overwhelming majority of the participants expressed that SAS EOF was like a family to them. This was yet another eye opener to me, as I was taken aback by how consistent and frequent this simile presented itself. I discovered that, true to all families, the program had counselors who played a parental-like role. They went above their official roles within the university and extended themselves to make the students and alumni feel as if they had a “home away from home” via SAS EOF. The counselors maintained a trusting role and gave these men the emotional and mental support they needed to continue persisting in their studies. The presence of relatable peers and parental figures indicated that the SAS EOF program was a refuge for Black men at Rutgers. The program was able to maintain its fictive kin, “like family,” appeal because the counselors and staff stayed connected to alumni, who willingly returned to the university to act as role models and mentors for current students. This created a cycle of in which members of SAS EOF were able to “pay it forward” and support other Black men in pursuit of their degrees. Through these efforts, SAS EOF was able to maintain a higher retention rate of Black men within the SAS EOF program, as

opposed to the nationwide retention rate of Black men at universities.

Implications

These findings have several implications for research, practice, and policy. I have found that higher educational researchers and practitioners would benefit from additional studies on how the SAS EOF program works as an anti-racist entity. While this study explores the role of peers and counselors, additional research would potentially highlight additional supports and “like family” members who help shape the program’s inclusivity. It would also be helpful to gain a full depiction of Black male, students’ retention issues if researchers study SAS EOF students who do not complete their degrees. In addition to these items, there are implications for practice, including the implementation of peer membership opportunities, informative and inclusive events, and greater financial assistance. Policymakers should also assess ways to increase the amount of money that students receive through SAS EOF in order to better help them afford their education while also funding more SAS EOF events that are helping the Black men in the program to retain at Rutgers.

Implications for research. My study presents opportunities for additional research on SAS EOF and how it is retaining Black, male students. Researchers should look closer at the issues and challenges that Black, male students in peer groups bring into their university experience because I found that these issues and challenges clearly determine how well the students are able to integrate into the university. Where my study finds that these challenges, including finances and self perception, caused Black to steer away from social opportunities and academic commitments, other researchers may discover that there are additional stressors that

Black, male students experience which negatively influence their persistence. Researchers can then point to additional ways in which programs like SAS EOF are able to support Black, male students' retention.

I believe that there is room for additional research on the SAS EOF program's role in Black male, students' peer-to-peer relations. My study finds that Black men benefited from having racially similar peers within SAS EOF because the program acted as a "common ground" despite the students' differing cultural backgrounds. The relationship among the men can be further investigated to identify the positive components, aside from the shared SAS EOF experience, that unites these men while also identifying ways in which these friendships can be furthered cultivated through programs like SAS EOF. These studies would allow SAS EOF to know if there are additional components to the program that should be implemented or strengthened.

Additional research should also be conducted to assess why some Black men in SAS EOF return to the program after dropping out of Rutgers and why others do not complete their degrees. My research suggests that the study participants had several challenges that come in the way of their academic goals; however, other researchers should capture the voices of degree non completers to have a full understanding of why they do and do not return to Rutgers via SAS EOF after dropping out. There may be room in the literature to identify ways in which SAS EOF and similar programs can assist degree non completers in returning to the university.

Implications for practice. While conducting my research, I found that SAS EOF can positively influence their Black, male students' experiences through several efforts. Through my

conversations with SAS EOF students and alumni, I found that they desired to help their younger cohorts socially and academically integrate into Rutgers. The students stated that this was something that would have enhanced their experience, and they felt that it would benefit other students. Unfortunately, they lacked a formal means of supporting peers outside of their immediate friends. I believe that SAS EOF can further support students by implementing an official way in which they can connect and mentor younger SAS EOF students. Given the program's role "like family," the program can fuel its cycle of support by implementing peer mentorship opportunities. Through this effort, the students would be able to formally connect with peers closer to their age and stay connected within the program, particularly since it was expressed that engagement decreases after the program participants' first year at Rutgers.

It can also be implied that Black men in the SAS EOF program would benefit from having additional events, like the Summer Institute, following their entry into Rutgers. All the participants in this study expressed that the Summer Institute was a defining factor of SAS EOF. They also shared many positive responses about their experiences during their summer session. Since the Summer Institute helped the men to bond and "catch up" on their academics, the program's leaders should consider replicating this success in order to strengthen and extend the students' satisfaction and sense of belonging in SAS EOF and at Rutgers.

SAS EOF could be enhanced by greater awareness of its existence. The majority students in this study expressed that they were initially unaware of SAS EOF, and they were introduced to the opportunity through their college application, a guidance counselor, or after they became a Rutgers student. This lack of awareness suggests that there may be other Black

men who qualify for the program and could benefit from its resources, but they may have missed the opportunity to join SAS EOF formally or as an “adopted student.” The program’s staff should actively promote its offerings to ensure that incoming and current students will not miss out on the program’s benefits.

This study further suggests that SAS EOF needs to implicate greater means of raising funds for its students. The young men in this study shared that they were challenged by working, sometimes multiple jobs, in order to afford their education which hindered their abilities to fully focus on their academics. It was also found that SAS EOF staff informally helped these students, which may have overextended those staff members who dipped into their personal finances in order to financially assist students. Instead, SAS EOF should concentrate on fundraising for the program in order to better help its students since they are from a low-income background, and they have expressed that SAS EOF was not enough to help them pay for their degrees.

Implications for policy. Since affording college is a key issue for SAS EOF students, it can be implied that policymakers should revisit the grant’s stipulations in order to allocate additional money. It is clear that the amount of money that SAS EOF students in this study receive is not enough for them to pay for their education. I found that low-income students in my study were challenged by their financial situation, and this further propelled them to find ways of identifying income sources. The additional responsibility of paying for college and working one or more jobs was difficult for many these students, working against their abilities to remain in school. Presumably, when additional money is associated towards SAS EOF, there will be less students who need to juggle working and attending college. In addition to saving

them this additional stressor, the increased grant amount would allow SAS EOF students to no longer struggle to pay for school and focus fully on their classes.

It is presumed that when policymakers make adjustments to SAS EOF, the program staff will be able to introduce more supportive events and services to support student retention. This includes the introduction of retreats like the Summer Institute and events featuring more role models. The additional money set aside for the SAS EOF would strengthen the program and allow its staff to continue doing the actions that are best serving their students.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study that need to be considered when reviewing the findings and implications for research, policy, and practice. One limitation is that this study assessed the students' current grade level at Rutgers as a benchmark. Students in their freshman through senior year were seen as persisting up until their current year at the university, with the majority of the participants in their freshman and sophomore. However, this study is limited because it did not follow the students through degree completion. Doing so would present a more accurate depiction of how well Black men are retaining at the university through SAS EOF and if their views on the program are altered over the years. Another follow up study would help to capture the participants' journey and strengthen the assessment of SAS EOF's abilities to retain Black men at Rutgers.

Another limitation of this study is that I interviewed and held focus groups with a small number of SAS EOF alumni. There were a total of four alumni participants in this study, not including the counselors who were alumni of the program. It was difficult to recruit alumni for

my work, since I had to only rely on promotions posted on the SAS EOF Facebook page and within the SAS EOF alumni Facebook group. It was uncertain whether there were enough active SAS EOF alumni on these pages, which complicated the outreach. As an alternative, I sought out but could not access an alumni database at the time of my study. If researchers within SAS EOF decided to continue this study, they could lean on their informal and formal access to SAS EOF alumni in order to gain more feedback about the alumni's experiences with the program.

The alumni in this study were from a range of academic years, which gave me insight into their distinct on-campus experience, particularly given the consolidation of Rutgers schools over the years and this link to racial relations at the university. Although SAS EOF alumni shared a wealth of information, this study would have benefitted from capturing the voices of additional Black, male SAS EOF alumni. The additional voices would present a full depiction of the SAS EOF experience by a variety of alumni. It would also help in discovering whether or not the findings would remain the same given the additional feedback by SAS EOF alumni. If researchers decide to replicate this study, their work would be enhanced by speaking with more SAS EOF alumni.

Conclusion

It is believed that greater education brings greater opportunities, and higher education is a means for advancement in society. This study demonstrates that some Black, male students do not have an easy path to their higher educational dreams. As the participants in this study showed, Black men within Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences Educational Opportunity Fund (SAS EOF) program bring challenging financial, personal, academic issues with them into their

university experience. This is coupled by the difficulties they experience socially integrating into the university due to institutional racism and microaggressions. However, this study shows that programs like SAS EOF are able to help Black men persist in college through their proactive work to create a hub for social and academic support. While this study has its limitations, it also presents room for additional research on SAS EOF programs and similar peer groups' role in helping Black men to earn their college degrees. Through these efforts, universities can move towards closing the achievement gap between White and Black, male students.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol for One-on-One Interviews with Students

Hi, as you know, my name is Renée Walker, and I am a doctoral candidate at Rutgers' Graduate School of Education. Thank you for participating in this interview. This one-on-one interview will enable me to learn about your experiences in Rutgers' School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF).

This interview also supports my dissertation, which explores the relationship between Rutgers SAS EOF program and its ability to help African American men to remain at Rutgers as opposed to dropping out. I have 16 questions that will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. If you have any questions during this time, please let me know.

Do you mind if I record this interview?

First, I am going to ask you some general questions.

1. Are you the first in your family to attend college?
2. If no, I will ask:
 - a. Who has attended college?
 - b. Do you receive any college advice from your family members who have attended college?
3. If yes, I will ask:
 - a. Do you have friends who have attended college?
 - b. Do you receive any college advice from your friends who have attended college?

Now, I am going to ask you a couple of questions related to your experience within the SAS EOF program.

1. Can you discuss how SAS EOF program helps you to address your financial needs?
2. Did you participate in the program over the summer before entering Rutgers?
 - a. If so, please describe this experience.
3. What SAS EOF activities have you participated in?
4. If I followed you through a typical SAS EOF meeting or activity, what would you do?
Walk me through this experience.

5. After you attend a meeting, what feelings are going through you?
6. How is your experience within the program?
7. Do you think that SAS EOF enhances your experience at Rutgers, or do you think it would be the same? Why?
8. Are you able to get any form of help from SAS EOF? If so, what can help do you receive?
9. How would you describe your experience with the SAS EOF counselors and directors?
10. How would you describe your experience with other SAS EOF students and/or alumni?
11. What are the strengths and weaknesses of SAS EOF program, in your opinion?

Now I am going to ask you a couple of questions related to your overall thoughts about Rutgers' relationship with African American students.

1. What are your thoughts about SAS EOF's role in the African American male experience at Rutgers?
2. Do you talk about these experiences within the SAS EOF program?
3. Does SAS EOF help you to feel like you belong at Rutgers?
4. If someone answers yes, I will ask how.
5. If someone was thinking about joining Rutgers' SAS EOF program, what would you tell them that they can expect?
6. Do you have any final thoughts on your experience within the SAS EOF program?

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me about your experience with Rutgers' SAS EOF program. Your feedback is greatly appreciated.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for One-on-One Interviews with SAS EOF Staff

Hi, as you know, my name is Renée Walker, and I am a doctoral candidate at Rutgers' Graduate School of Education. Thank you for participating in this interview. This one-on-one interview will enable me to learn about your experiences with Rutgers' School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF).

This interview also supports my dissertation, which explores the relationship between Rutgers' SAS EOF program and its ability to help African American men to remain at Rutgers as opposed to dropping out. I have 21 questions that will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. If you have any questions during this time, please let me know.

Do you mind if I record this interview?

First, I am going to ask you some general questions.

1. Please state your first name, last name, and position at Rutgers.
2. How long have you worked for Rutgers SAS EOF program?
3. Were you an EOF student? If so, at which college or university?
4. If yes to above question, how would you describe your experience as an EOF student?

Now, I am going to ask you a couple of questions related to your experience with the Rutgers' SAS EOF program.

1. What are your goals for the SAS EOF program?
2. Do you have any guiding principles and values that guide the program?
3. What do you think are the main concerns of SAS EOF students?
4. What do you think the students learn from participating in this program?
5. Can you discuss how the SAS EOF program helps to address students' financial needs?
6. Describe the process of working with these students.
7. Tell a story about a key moment in the process of working with a SAS EOF student.
8. Do you think that SAS EOF enhances students' experience at Rutgers, or do you think it would be the same? Why?
9. How would you describe your experience with SAS EOF students?
10. How would you describe your experience with SAS EOF alumni?

11. How would you describe your experience with SAS EOF degree non-completers?
12. What are the strengths and weaknesses of SAS EOF program, in your opinion?

Now I am going to ask you a couple of questions related to your overall thoughts about Rutgers SAS EOF's relationship with African American, male students.

1. What are the major issues facing African American students at Rutgers?
2. Can you discuss if and how the SAS EOF program helps to address the needs of African American students?
3. What are your thoughts about SAS EOF's role in the African American male experience at Rutgers?
4. Do you have a role in helping African American men to address institutional racism?
5. What are the counselors and other staff members' roles in relation to the African American, male experience at Rutgers?
6. Do you have any final thoughts about the SAS EOF program?

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me about your experience with Rutgers' SAS EOF program. Your feedback is greatly appreciated.

Appendix C: Protocol For Focus Groups for Students

Hi, my name is Renée Walker, and I am a doctoral candidate at Rutgers' Graduate School of Education. Thank you for participating in this focus group. This group interview will enable me to learn about your experiences in Rutgers' School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF). This group interview will also support my dissertation, which explores the relationship between Rutgers SAS EOF program and its ability to help African American men to remain at Rutgers as opposed to dropping out.

My role as the facilitator is to guide our discussion. I have 25 questions that will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. If you have any questions during this time, please let me know.

Do you mind if I record this interview?

First, I am going to ask you some general questions about each of you.

1. Please let me know your first name, last name, and level of study here at Rutgers.
2. How would you describe your ethnicity? Race?
3. How would you describe your gender association?

Now, I am going to ask you some questions about Rutgers' SAS EOF program.

1. How did you hear about SAS EOF?
2. Can you tell me why you decided to join the SAS EOF program?
3. How would you describe the strength of your involvement in SAS EOF (a little involved, average involvement, or very involved)? Why?

Now, I am going to ask you a couple of questions related to your experience within the SAS EOF program.

1. Can you describe the activities and experiences you have been involved in as a SAS EOF

student?

2. How many SAS EOF activities have you been involved in this academic year?
3. How do you hear about these activities?
4. Walk me through a typical meeting, counseling session, or activity in SAS EOF program. Tell me some things that you talk about in your meetings and/or counseling sessions. What would I hear and see?
5. If I followed you through a typical SAS EOF meeting, what would you do? Walk me through this experience.
6. After you attend a meeting, what feelings are going through you?
7. How is your experience within the program?
8. Do you think that SAS EOF enhances your experience at Rutgers, or do you think it would be the same? Why?
9. Are you able to get any form of help from SAS EOF? If so, what can help do you receive?
10. How would you describe your experience with the SAS EOF counselors and directors?
11. How would you describe your experience with other SAS EOF students and/or alumni?
12. What are the strengths and weaknesses of SAS EOF program, in your opinion?

Now I am going to ask you a couple of questions related to your overall thoughts about Rutgers' relationship with African American students.

1. What do you think about the African American experience at Rutgers?
2. Does this experience differ for you as an African American male?
3. Do you talk about these experiences within the SAS EOF program?
4. What are your thoughts about SAS EOF's role in the African American male experience at Rutgers?
5. Does SAS EOF help you to feel like you belong at Rutgers?
6. If someone answers yes, I will ask how.
7. If someone was thinking about joining Rutgers' SAS EOF program, what would you tell them that they can expect?
8. Do you have any final thoughts on your experience within the SAS EOF program?

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me about your experience with Rutgers' SAS EOF program. Your feedback is greatly appreciated.

Appendix D: Protocol For Focus Groups of Alumni

Hi, my name is Renée Walker, and I am a doctoral candidate at Rutgers' Graduate School of Education. Thank you for participating in this focus group. This group interview will enable me to learn about your experiences in Rutgers' School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF). This group interview will also support my dissertation, which explores the relationship between Rutgers SAS EOF program and its ability to help African American men to remain at Rutgers as opposed to dropping out.

My role as the facilitator is to guide our discussion. I have 25 questions that will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. If you have any questions during this time, please let me know.

Do you mind if I record this interview?

First, I am going to ask you some general questions about each of you.

1. Please let me know your first name, last name, and graduation year from Rutgers.
2. How would you describe your ethnicity? Race?
3. How would you describe your gender association?

Now, I am going to ask you some questions about Rutgers' SAS EOF program.

1. How did you hear about the SAS EOF program?
2. Can you tell me why you joined the SAS EOF program?
3. How would you describe the strength of your involvement in SAS EOF while you were a student (a little involved, average involvement, or very involved)? Why?

Now, I am going to ask you a couple of questions related to your experience within the SAS EOF program.

1. Can you describe the activities and experiences you were involved in as a SAS EOF student?
2. How many SAS EOF activities did you take part in (a few, and average number, or a lot of activities)?

3. Tell me some things that you talked about in your meetings and/or counseling sessions. What would I hear and see?
4. If I followed you through a typical SAS EOF meeting or activity, what would you have done? Walk me through this experience.
5. After you attended a meeting or activity, what feelings went through you?
6. How was your experience within the program?
7. Do you think that SAS EOF enhanced your experience at Rutgers, or do you think it would have been the same? Why?
8. Were you able to get any form of help from SAS EOF? If so, what can help did you receive?
9. How would you describe your experience with the SAS EOF counselors and directors?
10. How would you describe your experience with SAS EOF students while you were a student?
11. How would you describe your experience with other SAS EOF alumni?
12. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the SAS EOF program, in your opinion?
13. Are you still in touch with SAS EOF program members or facilitators?

Now I am going to ask you a couple of questions related to your overall thoughts about Rutgers' relationship with African American students.

1. What do you think about the African American male experience at Rutgers?
2. Did you talk about these experiences within the SAS EOF program?
3. What are your thoughts about SAS EOF's role in the African American male experience at Rutgers?
4. Did SAS EOF help you to feel like you belong at Rutgers?
5. If someone answers yes, I will ask how.
6. If someone was thinking about joining Rutgers' SAS EOF program, what would you tell them that they can expect?
7. Do you have any final thoughts on your experience within the SAS EOF program?

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me about your experience with Rutgers' SAS EOF program. Your feedback is greatly appreciated.

Appendix E: Recruitment Letter For Students

Dear Rutgers SAS EOF student,

I am writing to ask for your help with a research study about Black men's experiences in Rutgers' School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program. While Rutgers SAS EOF serves a large population of students with financial need, this study seeks to focus on the African American male population since Black men tend to be underrepresented as students and graduates of higher education. The goal is to fully evaluate the program's ability to help Black men navigate institutional racism and adjust socially at Rutgers.

As a SAS EOF student, I am sure you know the importance of getting into a university and completing your degree. You also know that Rutgers SAS EOF provides academic and social support to help you while you're pursuing your studies. There is much to be learned about how you are being prepared for the challenges and opportunities in college through SAS EOF.

By studying your experience in Rutgers SAS EOF program, I may be able to build on the understanding of African American students' needs. This may be helpful for researchers and program facilitators who seek to improve the quality of students' educational experiences. It may also inform educators on how EOF programs relate to the retention of African American men in higher education.

With this in mind, I am seeking your permission for the following:

- Allow me to observe, take notes, and digitally audio record your participation in a Rutgers SAS EOF workshop or event and use those recordings for data analysis. All the names of people, including yours, and locations will be changed.
- Allow me to interview, take notes, and digitally audio record you during a one-on-one interview for data analysis. All the names of people, including yours, and locations will be changed.
- Allow me to interview, take notes, and digitally audio record you during a focus group interview and use this information for data analysis. All the names of people, including yours, and locations will be changed.


If you are interested in participating in this study, please respond to this email. Please also feel free to ask me any questions about the study.

Sincerely,

Renée

Renée Walker, raw46@scarletmail.rutgers.edu

Appendix F: Observation Agendas and Programs



SAS EOF
SAS: Student Affairs Support
End of Fatigue

Student Access and Educational Equity
Endorsement Academic Advisor
1000 University Avenue, Suite 1000
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 732.932.1000
Email: sas_eof@rutgers.edu

Rutgers Male Empowerment Network
1000 University Avenue, Suite 1000
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 732.932.1000
Email: sas_eof@rutgers.edu

Rutgers Male Empowerment Network (RUMEN) Fall 2017 Retreat

Date: November 11, 2017 – November 12, 2017
Location: Blawie Center, 1-8 Hillbrook Road, Blumstein, NJ 07003

Sunday, November 11, 2017

7:00-8:45am	Rise and Shine – Washhouse Time!
8:00am	Breakfast (All Students & Staff)
10:00am	Adventure Course: Communication & Leadership
12:00pm	Lunch (All Students & Staff)
12:45pm	Helmets & Harnesses
1:00pm	High Robes Courses
2:45pm	Final Debrief & Survey Feedback
3:00pm	Success Panel
4:30pm	Break
5:00pm	“Mastery of Self” Workshop
6:30pm	Dinner (All Students & Staff)
7:30pm	Professional Development Workshop
9:00pm	A Conversation on Healthy Relationships
10:00pm	Campfire & S’mores
10:30pm	Hardwick Township Quiet Hours

HUGS DIVERSITY SHOWCASE

Busch Student Center - Multipurpose Room | November 15, 2017

AGENDA

4:30 - 5:00pm	Registration / Sign In
5:05 - 5:10pm	Welcome from Student Access and Educational Equity and University Career Services Wenylla Reid, Associate Director for Employer Relations Jakora Holman, Director of Planning and Operations
5:10 - 5:55pm	Employer Presentations of approximately 1 minute each
6:00 - 7:00pm	Open Networking
7:00 - 7:30pm	Raffle Winners Announced and Closing Remarks Sabrina Riddick, Program Coordinator for SAE
7:30pm	Program Concludes

Employers and Organizations in Attendance

America Needs You <https://www.americanneedsyou.org/about/careers/>
"America Needs You fights for economic mobility for ambitious, first-generation college students. We do this by providing transformative mentorship and intensive career development."

AT & T <http://att.jobs/careers>
"A diverse workforce and inclusive culture are essential to AT&T. They allow us to attract and retain the best and the brightest to develop the most innovative products and solutions to meet our customers' needs."

Brown Brothers Harriman (BBH) <https://www.bbh.com/en-us/careers>
"Our purpose is straightforward: to help protect our clients' financial well-being, and to grow their assets over long periods of time. Our clients are at the center of everything we do, and we structure our firm, teams, and businesses to keep it that way. Our integrity will not be compromised."

Burlington Stores <https://burlingtonstores.jobs/why-choose-a-career-at-burlington.asp>
"Tomorrow's leaders are today's college students, and at Burlington we believe in investing in the best and brightest students of today to help them grow into the strongest, most intelligent leaders of tomorrow."

Cenlar FSB <http://www.cenlar.com/>
"Our mission is To be the premier loan servicing provider and wholesale bank, delivering solutions to our clients that are unmatched in quality, innovation and flexibility."

Cintas <http://www.cintas.com/careers/>
"Our mission is to expand and maximize the utilization of our network of certified minority, woman, and veteran owned businesses who will enhance Cintas' value and drive a competitive business advantage."

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