Executive Summary and Report

Success of Black and Latino Men at Rutgers University–New Brunswick

Division of Enrollment Management

Rutgers University–New Brunswick

Roberto C. Orozco, Graduate Assistant

Executive Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to develop, through an anti-deficit framework, an understanding of the social and academic forces assisting Black and Latino undergraduate college men at Rutgers University–New Brunswick (RU–NB) to persist toward graduation. Findings elucidate the need to acknowledge the presence of Black and Latino men as more than just a community of students who may need resources but one that aspires beyond their undergraduate education.

Research Questions

1. How do Black and Latino college men manage to persist and earn their degrees despite transition issues, racist stereotypes, academic under preparedness, and other negative forces?
2. What resources are most effective in helping Black and Latino college men achievers?
3. How do Black and Latino men cultivate meaningful, value-added relationships with key institutional agents?

Demographics of Students

- 18 students in 30+ campus organizations or academic programs
- Race/Ethnicity
  - 9 Latino, 7 Black, 2 Afro-Latino
- 11 first-time, full-time students; 7 transfer students
- 13 first-generation college students
- Average GPA: 3.19; Lowest: 2.70 and Highest: 3.72
- STEM (12), Business (3), and Social Sciences (3)

Findings

- Lack of interaction with the admissions office before applying to Rutgers University–New Brunswick.
- Participants valuing individualized support systems as opposed to one-size-fits-all services.
- Rutgers not being a first-choice school for several of the participants yet the most affordable at the time of making the decision to enroll in college.
- Involvement in student organizations served as a source of support for participants but also as a form of accountability to do well academically and professionally.
- Participants experienced immense pressure to succeed due to being Black and/or Latino in fields where representation by people of color is not as strong (i.e. STEM).
- Aspiring beyond the baccalaureate was a common theme among many of the participants who planned to pursue graduate school but many of them did not know how to begin the application process.
- All the participants had solidified post-graduation plans working in their field of study or attending graduate school the following academic year.

Introduction

Institutions of higher education are increasingly working toward improving the student experience from the initial contact students have with a college or university all the way through graduation and beyond. This research is a continuation of the work by the 2011 Committee on Student Success which outlined multiple recommendations for Rutgers University–New Brunswick. Of these recommendations, a focus on men of color, particularly Black and Latino men, was put forth as an initiative that required institutional support through both academic and student affairs departments (Student Success Committee, 2011). Given the focus on the college success of men of color, both locally and nationally, this research study is timely and contributes to the national dialogue on higher education issues occurring over the last decade. Therefore, examining how Black and Latino men at RU–NB manage to persist to graduation while focusing on essential resources used by these students can position RU–NB as a leading university in supporting Black and Latino college men.

Overview of the Literature on Black and Latino Men

Over the last decade, the success of Black and Latino men in post-secondary education has taken center stage when speaking about issues of race and gender. Black and Latino men in higher education continue to face issues of retention and success at a higher level than their White and Asian peers. This is further exacerbated by the deficit rhetoric that continues to define how higher education conceptualizes Black and Latino men (Harper, 2010). It is important to note that the success of Black and Latino men in higher education requires these students to be enrolled in post-secondary education. Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) examined the alternative pathways to higher education for Latino college-age men such as entering the workforce directly after high school, school-to-prison pipeline, and enlisting in the military. Despite pathways that deter Black and Latino men from higher education, there is increasing number of Black and Latino men continuing to enroll in colleges and universities. (Harris, Bensimon, & Bishop, 2010; Harper, 2006; Harper & Associates, 2014; Pérez & Saenz, 2017; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Furthermore, attending a 2-year community college is an alternative for many students who cannot afford to pay or meet the requirements for a 4-year college education. Bukoski and Hatch (2016) found that Black and Latino men who were enrolled in community college encountered issues of conflict with family expectations, self-perception, and balancing multiple responsibilities, but the student's expectation to succeed helped them continue on the path toward graduation or transferring to a four-year institution. While most research on Black and Latino men has been conducted with students attending a 4-year college or university, it is important to recognize that Black and Latino men are overrepresented in the 2-year college sector. Transferring to a 4-year institution can become a difficult task when the structure and support is not provided for students.

Furthermore, racial stereotypes, negative campus climate experiences, and lack of individualized support for their student needs are a few obstacles Black and Latino men face as they matriculate and persist to graduation (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). Low graduation rates are often relegated to individual student motivation and persistence rather than examining how institutions of higher education fail to provide the mechanisms of support for students to succeed (Harris, Bensimon, & Bishop, 2010). Scholars have since shifted their approach of investigating the deficit understanding of Black and Latino men toward acknowledging the strengths these students hold

that assist them in achieving college success, conceptualized as an anti-deficit approach. An anti-deficit achievement framework "highlights institutional agents, policies, programs, and resources that help" men of color "achieve desired educational outcomes across a range of institutional contexts" (Harper, 2007, p.61). Therefore, using an anti-deficit framework provides researchers and administrators with a more holistic understanding of the success of Black and Latino men in higher education (Harper, 2010).

One of the forms of support that sustain Black and Latino men's success is the peer networks they develop coupled with the mentorship opportunities they are given. Pérez and Taylor (2016) assert that Latino men negotiate their cultural capital wealth by leaning on peers who have navigated the college process and on mentors who provide them with the resources and emotional support needed to be successful. Similarly, Pérez and Saenz (2017) examined how Latino males thrived at a selective 4-year institution. They found that Latino males thrived in areas of academics, engagement in the learning process, and building interpersonal social networks of peers and mentors they connect with on campus. Additionally, engagement on campus through student organizations or leadership opportunities, building a network of faculty and staff, and being aware of the racial and hostile campus climate contributes to their success. Harper (2009) found that Black men at predominantly white colleges and universities succeed through their formal networks such as fraternity membership or assuming a student leadership position to assist in combatting racist stereotypes. Furthermore, both Black and Latino men "simultaneously navigate and experience racism and success" on college and university campuses, managing to succeed even when in hostile climates both inside and outside the classroom (Harper, 2009, p. 709).

Several studies and national reports have examined the achievement of college students who identify as Black and/or Latino men (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2006, 2009, 2014, 2012; Harris, Bensimon, & Bishop, 2010; Pérez, 2014; Perez II & Saenz, 2017; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, 2011; Strayhorn, 2010). These studies highlight the importance of leveraging the success of Black and/or Latino college men to assist in the future development and implementation of programs and initiatives that propel them toward graduation. Harper & Associates (2014) used an anti-deficit framework to examine how Black and Latino men accessed higher education by interviewing both high school students and enrolled undergraduate students at the time of their study. Multiple themes emerged that placed emphasis on the success of these students and how they continued to persist through both secondary and post-secondary education. Expanding outreach initiatives, recruiting more expansively, and improving the professional preparation of guidance counselors through professional development sessions served as key initiatives of focus for higher education professionals and institutional leaders (Harper & Associates, 2014). Furthermore, research shows that colleges and universities must market resources to students of color, and specifically to Black and Latino men, more aggressively as some students may not have the knowledge of the multiple processes of the college experience. Similarly, Harris, Bensimon, and Bishop (2010) provide recommendations for institutional leaders to ask themselves the ways in which current practices are failing Black and Latino males. Comparatively, institutional leaders must also investigate which practices are helping Black and Latino men succeed and persist to graduation. This research study poses the latter statement as a question to investigate how Black and Latino men succeed at RU–NB.

Contextualizing Black and Latino Men Success at Rutgers University–New Brunswick

Examining the experiences of Black and Latino men is essential to RU–NB due to the enrollment and graduation patterns of this student population. Figure 1 depicts the 3-year enrollment of Black and Latino Men at RU–NB. In the last three years, enrollment of Black and Latino men has consistently decreased. Black men constitute on average slightly under 3% of the overall first-time, full-time degree seeking enrolling class, while Latino men constitute around 6% of the same class (Rutgers University Office of Institutional Research and Planning, 2019).
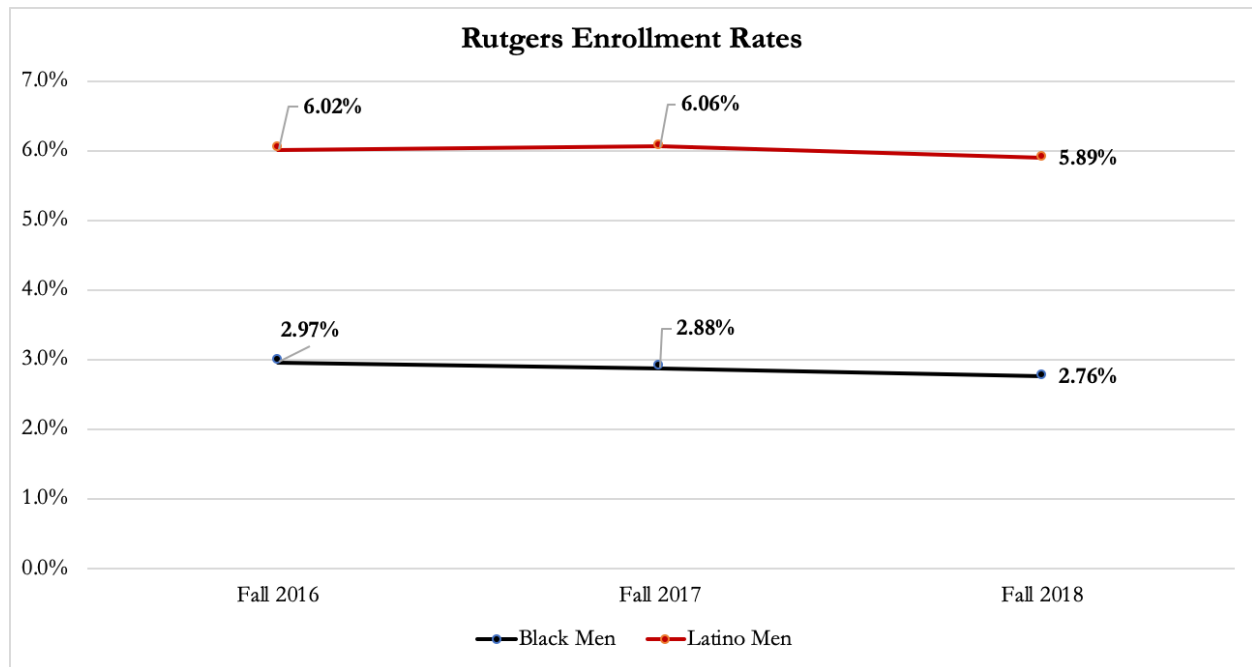

Figure 1. Black and Latino Men Enrollment at Rutgers University–New Brunswick

While enrollment percentages have dropped a few decimal points, the graduation rates of Black and Latino men highlight the success of these students at RU–NB. Figure 2. depicts the 6-year graduation rate of students who graduated in 2017, Black men and Latino men currently stand at an average of 66.3% and 73.0%, respectively. There is no significant difference in percentage points compared to other Big 10 institutions, but, these graduations rates are above the national average 6-year graduation rates of other 4-year public institutions (Shapiro, Dundar, Huie, Wakhungu, Bhimdiwala, & Wilson, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The data show there is still much to do to improve the graduation rates among these different racial groups on a national level. RU–NB is comparatively higher than the national average when it comes to 6-year graduation rates of Black and Latino men. Therefore, this research contends with rhetoric that Black and Latino men don't succeed and explores the mechanisms that contribute to the success of these students toward graduation.
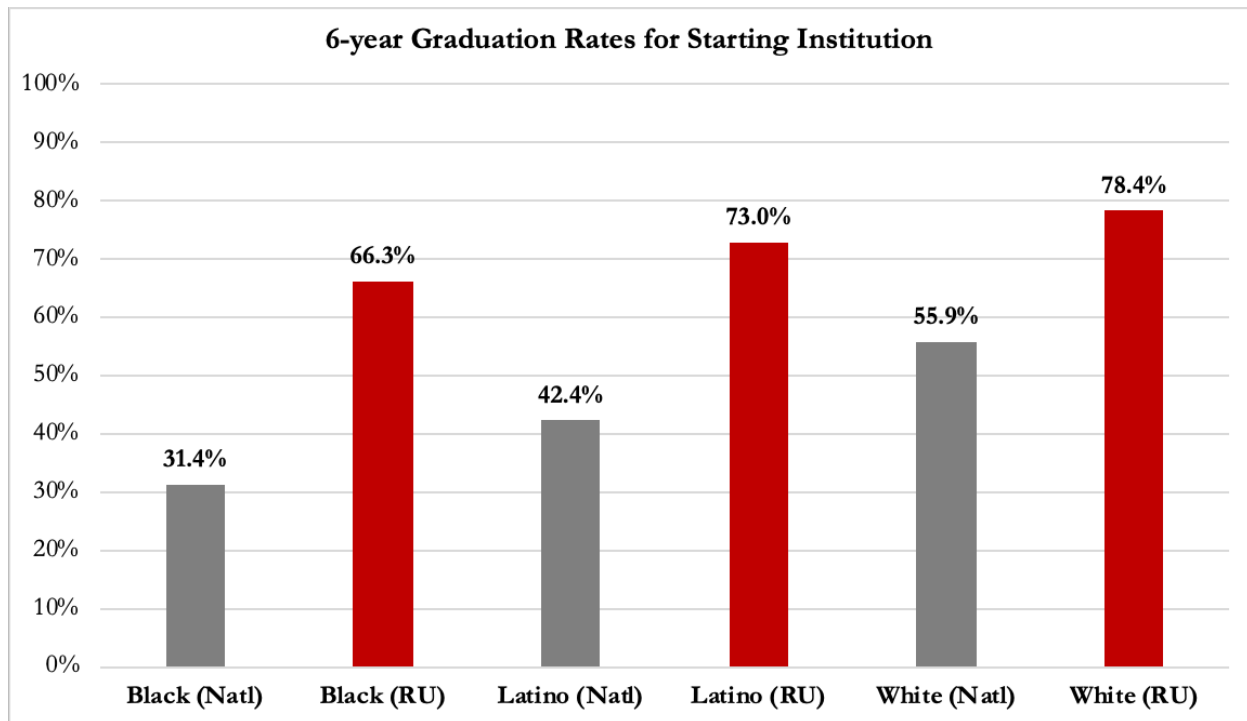
6-year Graduation Rates for Starting Institution

Figure 2. Black and Latino Men 6-year graduation rate (Rutgers University–New Brunswick)

Methodology

This study utilized a phenomenological approach with an anti-deficit framework in collecting the data. Phenomenological research examines "a particular phenomenon among a small group of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon" (Jones, Torres, Arminio, 2014, p. 89). Quantitative data provides us with a bigger picture of potential causation, but it is through qualitative methods such as phenomenology that we can decipher the nuances and untold narratives of the student experience (Harper, 2007). Within this study, the phenomenon being explored is success which is conceptualized as graduating from RU–NB within a specific timeframe of 6-years since first enrollment at RU–NB. The participants who have experienced this phenomenon are Black and/or Latino men at the institution. The benefit in using phenomenology is that it describes what participants have experienced, how they have experienced it, and how they have made sense of this phenomenon (Harper, 2009).

Research Questions

Several research questions formed the basis of the study and helped uncover the experiences participants had at Rutgers University–New Brunswick:

1. How do Black and Latino college men manage to persist and earn their degrees despite transition issues, racist stereotypes, academic under preparedness, and other negative forces?
2. What resources are most effective in helping Black and Latino college men achievers?
3. How do Black and Latino men cultivate meaningful, value-added relationships with key institutional agents?

Positionality of Researcher

As the principal investigator of this research study, considering my positionality informs how my own social identities and relatability to participants may have influenced participant's perceptions to engage with the research. As a Latino man who is actively pursuing a PhD, I can relate to Black and Latino men graduating from an institution like RU–NB. My experiences differed as I attended a historically white institution in the Midwest, but nonetheless, experiencing microaggressions and wanting to combat stereotypes attributed to Latinos contributed to my aspiration to graduate with a bachelor's degree. Furthermore, as a first-generation college student, navigating the complexity of an institution is something I could relate to as participants spoke about their experiences. Lastly, there were multiple instances where participants disclosed racialized experiences they had in and out of the classroom, both on and off campus, that triggered an understanding of the racial campus climate of Rutgers University–New Brunswick. I can only assume that their disclosure may have been prompted, to some extent, due to our shared experiences and understanding. For example, one participant described "giving the head nod" to other men of color on campus as a sign of validation of, "hey, I see you" or "what's up", which provided an insight into how men of color understand how they are situated on a campus like RU–NB. The nuance in this form of validation is one that I was able to understand because I, too, have engaged in using body language as a form of acknowledgement for others in my community. Therefore, positionality as part of the methodological process helps to inform, to some extent, how and why participants may disclose and engage with the research study (Harper, 2009; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014)

Data Source and Method

The Office of the Registrar at RU–NB provided the names and emails of all Black and Latino men who were graduating within six years of their initial enrollment and during 2018 and spring of 2019. All potential participants were contacted via a formal recruitment email sent out via the Division of Enrollment Management. A second individualized email was sent by the principal investigator to each potential participant. And, a third email was sent out to participant who had contact with campus departments on campus, the Centro for Latino Arts and Culture and the Paul Robeson Cultural Center, respectively. Participants who agreed to participate in the interview needed to confirm they met the research study criteria:

1. Identify as a Black and/or Latino man
2. Be scheduled to graduate in 2018 or spring 2019
3. Be graduating within 6-years of initial enrollment at Rutgers University–New Brunswick

After confirming criteria were met, consent was received, and individual interviews were conducted with participants in person in the Division of Enrollment Management or online using the Zoom platform. Each individual interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes. Participants were asked a set of questions that connected with the three research questions of this study. The research questions were asked chronologically capturing the participants experience applying to RU–NB, who or what offices were supportive during their undergraduate experience, and what their plans were post-graduation including their definition of success. Following each interview, participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire. Participants were compensated $25 for their participation in the research study.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed and data were analyzed using an initial line by line analysis. This initial coding included words or phrases that participants used in their interview. Keywords were captured to make sense of the experience's participants detailed in their interviews. A second data analysis was then conducted to refine the codes generated in the initial coding process. Major themes were then generated to capture the essence of the experience participants shared. These themes were then supported by current research in addition to narratives that reflected the overarching themes.

Findings

Several themes were generated from the data collected including the lack of interaction with the admissions office before applying to RU–NB, participants valuing individualized support systems as opposed to one-size-fits-all services, and Rutgers not being a first-choice school for several of the participants but rather the most affordable at the time of college enrollment. Furthermore, involvement in student organizations served as a source of support for participants but also as a form of accountability to do well academically and professionally. Participants also experienced immense pressure to succeed due to being Black and/or Latino in fields where representation by People of Color is not as strong (i.e., STEM). Another theme was the aspiration participants had to acquire a degree beyond the baccalaureate although many of them did not know how to begin the process of applying to graduate schools. Lastly, all the participants had solidified post-graduation plans working in their field of study or attending graduate school the following academic year. These findings shift the conceptualization of deficit-based research on Black and Latino men in higher education and positions them as students who aspire to succeed.

Interaction with Admissions Office Before Enrolling at Rutgers University

The first point of contact many students have with a college or university is often through the work of the Admissions Office. The initial contact with students is important as it can provides knowledge about the institution and can significantly influence a student's decision to apply and/or enroll there. Only one participant mentioned interacting with an admissions counselor during an event at his high school. For the other participants in the research study, their interaction with a representative of the Admissions Office or other faculty and staff took place after the application process when they received their acceptance to the institution.

In addition, understanding the application process can be daunting, especially when the barriers of being a first-generation college student and a man of color are added to the experience. Of the participants in this study, 13 identified as first-generation college students. For Black and Latino men, enlisting in the army, going into the workforce, or attending a community college or a 4-year institution are the three choices often afforded after high school, although the latter choice still comes with several barriers (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Most participants knew that access to college was the pathway for them and their family's success but understanding the application process came with challenges. Participants spoke about navigating the application process by themselves most of the time since their parents or families could only provide social support or financial support, in some cases, but understanding how to apply and which schools to apply became a challenge for students who couldn't rely on peers or family who had experienced the

application process. This contributed to their decision on schools to which to apply, the financial aid information to which they had access, and the social and academic resources about which the students knew at Rutgers.

Enrolled in Rutgers due to Affordability

While the number of Black and Latino men enrolling in a postsecondary institution has continued to increase, many are at 2-year community colleges (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). In this study, seven participants started at a community college or another 4-year institution before transferring to RU–NB. The other eleven participants started at Rutgers as first-time, full-time status students. Affordability and cost were two of the top reason's participants selected Rutgers, even if it was not their first-choice institution. Proximity to family was another reason participant's selected to enroll at RU–NB.

Collectively, the participants applied to several other in-state and out-of-state institutions that are comparable to Rutgers University–New Brunswick. The participants who transferred to Rutgers came from a community college in New Jersey (i.e., Raritan Valley Community College or Union County Community College) or another 4-year institution (i.e., Fairleigh Dickinson University, Seton Hall University, The Catholic University of America, and West Point Academy). Participants who selected to enroll at Rutgers University–New Brunswick, applied to several other comparable universities both in and out of New Jersey (i.e., Boston University, Case Western University, Fordham University, Monmouth University, Montclair State University, New Jersey Institute of Technology, Penn State University, Rider University, Rowan University, Seton Hall University, Stevens Institute of Technology, Syracuse University, The College of New Jersey, University of Pittsburgh, and William Patterson University).

Students Value Individualized Support Systems

Individualized support can become a crucial component of the student experience as universities work to increase completion rates of all students. Individualized support networks became an important component of the participant's experience at RU–NB. Participants described their experiences with campus departments that provided a holistic approach at advising and supporting. For example, several participants spoke about their experience with the Office for Diversity and Academic Success in the Sciences (ODASIS). This office provided them with advising and support that captured their experiences outside of their academics and provided them with formal and informal networks of peer support.

Individualized support systems do not mean that new programs or initiatives must be created for each single student. Rather, it is an opportunity to understand each student and their experience so that the university can best serve their needs with existing resources, and if needed, provide interventions that may cater to their individual needs as the second resort. Students also mentioned relying on their peers for insight into different offices and/or faculty in their specific programs on which they could rely for support. A point of contention for many participants was the support they received from their academic advisors, which participants mentioned they often avoided because of the transactional feeling of these interactions.

Involvement in Student Organizations served as a Source of Support and Accountability

Involvement on campus serves as one predictor toward persistence and student success in college. Although involvement in student organizations, student affairs offices, or academic departments are positive contributors to a student's success, the opportunity to be involved on campus differs depending on the level of responsibility a student has with their academics and responsibilities outside of the college environment. Participants experienced the most support from their involvement in student organizations and campus departments. Additionally, participants felt a sense of accountability in social and professional organizations where they saw their peers excel academically and obtain professional experiences in their respective fields. The following is one of the many example's students provided:

> *"Essentially it kind of opened the doors for me to network with people of similar backgrounds myself and it allowed me just to see that it was possible for me to be there. The reason why [professional organization] is so important is because they [speaking to his peers in the organization] were in a similar situation as myself and they also struggled when they first came here [referring to Rutgers University] and when you see somebody that you can relate to and somebody has a similar story to you, it kind of gives you hope and it kind of just allows you to kind of know that you can still do it."*

> *-Rodrigo (all names here on out are pseudonyms in place of participants real names)*

This participant shared that seeing other students succeed served as a reminder that he, too, could achieve his goals. Furthermore, being able to relate to other peers when it comes to personal experiences was a positive contributor to participants staying committed to each other.

Students Experienced Immense Pressure to Succeed due to their Race/Ethnicity

Black and Latino men often face the pressure to succeed due to the stereotypes placed on men of color and the microaggressions they may experience on campus. Participants touched on the stress they experienced if they did not do well, because as some of them mentioned, "*others may think it's a reflection of my community*". One participant shared,

> *"As an engineering student and being the only Black man that was in engineering and like within my immediate friend group was more pressure than you would think because when you're going through classes you're also thinking that you're not just performing for yourself, but you're also performing so that people would see that, like you don't fit a stereotype or that you're not good enough to be in college." -Jamal*

This pressure was not always overt in their interactions with others, but some participants did mention their in-class experiences as a man of color. One participant went into detail about the discrimination and microaggressions he experienced in the classroom by his white peers. Moreover, participants self-prescribed pressure on themselves by placing expectations to succeed academically for their families. Two participants described how their own expectations were guided by commitment to family.

> *"Like, I really want to be here. I enjoy being at school for the first time. I'm independent but I come from a very family oriented and family is very important to me. I'm a first-generation student, and for my family it brings a lot of expectations and pressure. But, I've been doing the best I can. I'm doing the best I can, and I will graduate, and I will fulfill this for myself or my family and everybody that's been supporting me all these years." -Elliott*

"It's hard to think about what speaks to your experience when you're Black or Latino because you're still living in a matrix of society which is filled with all these biases and preconceptions about being less than intelligent and untrustworthy. Like there's no escaping it as long as I'm around people who aren't Black or Latino." -Ediberto

Participants spoke about the opportunity Rutgers provided to meet people of diverse backgrounds while at the same time sharing their concern about the inclusivity of the campus, from their own experiences with microaggressions.

"So, racism [speaking about microaggressions] that you experience, not really like words that you hear or people calling you names, just like, people's [on campus] attitudes towards you when you talk to them. The disposition when you are around them, I still notice it here [at Rutgers University]. Like, if I am with my friends and we're in a group walking and we pass by a group of like white people on the sidewalk they will try to avoid us. And I've experienced it with the administration, like with [department omitted] on campus. It can be really rude compared to how they treat other students who don't look like me." -Steven

Interestingly, some participants minimized forms of microaggressions or discrimination they faced by reinforcing the diversity of students found within Rutgers University. Conversely, other participants highlighted their discontent with the way the institution defined diversity as an institutional-wide concept. These participants acknowledged that there are areas that the institution could work on in order to serve the diverse array of students.

"Being a Black or Latino man it's a pretty fly under the radar kind of thing at the school because although Rutgers tends to claim that it's super diverse, like all inclusive, it not necessarily like that. It's still primarily white students on campus. It's diverse but it's also not diverse. It's conflicting to say the least, I guess because like there are places where I do feel incredibly welcomed and with all the support in the world, but as far as the school at large, supporting Latino and Black students, I don't feel like it's doing that." -Elijah

Students Aspired Beyond the Baccalaureate Degree

Although Black and Latino men face several institutional barriers achieving a baccalaureate degree, for some, aspirations for success go beyond their first degree. Of the 18 participants in the research study, 10 expressed interest in pursuing a post-baccalaureate degree in their respective undergraduate major or closely related field of study. The thought of pursuing a graduate degree often followed the participants interaction with a professor through a formal research experience or through a mentorship relationship built outside the classroom.

Although several participants wanted to pursue a graduate degree, many indicated they were not knowledgeable about the process. The two aspects of the graduate school process with which participants expressed concern were the application for graduate studies and the financial aid process of acquiring funding for their graduate degree. Some participants had already applied and were waiting for a decision, but these participants also expected that funding their graduate studies would come solely at their own expense through loans. Mentorship proved to be a factor in participants' aspirations toward applying to graduate school and provided an avenue for participants to express their questions to individuals that could be of support during the process.

All Student Solidified Post-Graduation Plans

With the current state of higher education, internal and external constituents are tracking post-graduation outcomes of colleges and universities more closely. Simultaneously, institutions of higher education are advising students to achieve post-graduation outcomes within 4 to 5 years to reduce student debt. For the participants in this research study, post-graduation plans included working full-time in their respective degree field or applying and enrolling to grad school within the next academic year. Participants who acquired a full-time position directly after graduation expressed that their internship experience had provided them with a pathway toward full-time work status in their field.

Success is Community-Oriented

Because these participants had reached a milestone of graduating from Rutgers University–New Brunswick, we expected that they may be at a place where success is conceptualized differently than when they first started at RU–NB. In response to being asked how they defined success; participants indicated that success was achieved by meeting personal goals they had set for themselves but that it was community oriented. Much like the participants felt the pressure to succeed due to their family obligations and/or to combat the stereotypes attributed to their race, participants defined success as being able to give back to their family and their community. Some participants mentioned success being tied to acquiring tangible things such money through a full-time job to provide for themselves and their family. Because they were preparing to graduate, participants also expressed interest in helping other Black and Latino students succeed through college by giving back and mentoring the next generation of students. The following are testimonials student shared of their definition of success:

> *"I think success is reaching those goals that I set for myself, but then again life is unpredictable...I still don't know everything so a door might open up that might take me a completely different track, and I'm open to that...I think success is reaching the goals you have your eyes locked on" -Hakim*

> *"First primary to success is that it is a personal fulfillment. You have dreams, you have ambitions. Realizing that or at least saying that you did everything you could to realize that...secondary to that is how your success reflects your relationship with the people who are in your life. And my definition of success, unless that translates into the betterment of the people around you, then it's not success." -Ediberto*

> *"So, my idea of success is going to medical school and making an impact in my community that is underrepresented. My view of success would be introducing the concept of mental health into my community to take that stigma away. If I can do anything to remove the stigma that would make me successful." -Steven*

> *"For me success means growing as a person. Being a better person than you were yesterday. And I feel like Rutgers pushes you to grow, to push past adversity, where you can achieve certain goals, and dealing with all the classes and how big the institution is. Success is growth." -Ricardo*

> *"Success means being financially stable to be able to take care of them [family]. It means avoiding stress and finding a balance in life to do what makes you happy." -Victor*

Overall, these findings provide insight to the experiences of Black and Latino men at Rutgers University–New Brunswick. While not exhaustive, these findings serve as a foundation for departmental and institutional initiatives that can better serve the needs of Black and Latino men.

Furthermore, these findings align with national research on Black and Latino men and have implications to further the discussion on this student population in higher education.

Limitations

Several limitations exist for this research study. Of more than 600 students who were contacted to participate in the research study, 18 responded to the call for participants. The low response does not take away from the valuable information shared by the Black and/or Latino men who did agree to participate, but the data are clearly not generalizable to all Black and Latino men at Rutgers University – New Brunswick. The second limitation is the nuances participants experience during their time in college. In a phenomenological study like this one, it is important to honor each individual narrative while simultaneously developing a collective story. The third limitation of the study was the questions asked in the interview. The interview, although semi-structured, focused on their experience through the student life cycle so the extent to which participants touched on issues of race and gender were limited. Asking more direct questions about their social experiences as Black and Latino men on campus could have elicited more information about the campus climate towards this student population. A fourth limitation of the study was the method of analysis that generated the multiple themes in the findings section. Although multiple levels of analysis were conducted, having multiple levels of analysis conducted by multiple people may have generated themes that are more refined and specific. Lastly, another limitation of the study is the extent of which participants select to share their in-depth feelings, perceptions, and overall thoughts on their experience at Rutgers University–New Brunswick. The participants in the study all reached an important milestone in their lives by graduating from a competitive four-year institution, which may skew their perception of their experience if they feel obligated to pay gratitude to the university for the opportunity to access higher education. Future research should take into consideration the extent of these limitations when examining the experiences of Black and/or Latino college men.

Discussion

The findings of this study elucidate areas of opportunity for Rutgers University–New Brunswick. For this study, most students were first-generation college students. It is also important to note that not all students of color are low-income or first-generation, which is a widely used assumption by scholars and practitioners in higher education. Although Black and Latino men at RU–NB have a higher graduation rate than the national cohort, there is still a wide gap between Black and Latino men and their White and Asian peers. Harris, Bensimon, and Bishop's (2010) Equity Scorecard is a framework that helps to reframe how institutions of higher education meet the needs of men of color. While several initiatives targeted at men of color are often developed through the lens of student affairs, integrating the academic and cultural practices found in each college and university work toward developing an institutional commitment for the success of Black and Latino men. Furthermore, "institutional and systemic changes are more likely to happen when college leaders and instructors look for the causes of inequities in the domains of policy and practice that they control and can influence directly" (Harris, Bensimon, & Bishop, 2010, p. 279). Several opportunities exist for future research and implementation of practices that better serve the needs of this specific student population.

First, intentional outreach and support must be provided for Black and Latino men prior to application process and moving them through the student life cycle. Rutgers was not a first-choice school for several of the participants in this study because for many of them they relied on their school's counselors or friends who espoused a belief that Rutgers University was a safe school for admissions into the institution. As Rutgers continues to increase its academic profile it starts moving away from this notion, however at the same time this increase comes with the exclusion of certain student populations who may not have the same secondary education resources to achieve the high academic profile. Communicating the requirements for admissions to Rutgers earlier in their academic career can assist in the preparation of enrolling more Black and Latino men, both in-state and out-of-state students. Harper and Associates (2014) research on Black and Latino male high school achievement provides insight into how Black and Latino men are tracked into specific schools because of the messaging they receive from those around them while being qualified for more selective institutions. For this reason, intentional outreach provides Rutgers with the opportunity to be a top choice for Black and Latino men who may not have been previously exposed to the institution via their school counselors or other mentors.

Furthermore, Rutgers University–New Brunswick must recruit more expansively. As Harper and Associates (2014) note, "colleges and universities frequently recruit students from the same high schools year after year", which can be limiting to the goal of access for students from marginalized communities. Therefore, as admissions counselors and pre-college programs strategize to recruit new students, a commitment to continue to be the state institution must lead our initiatives. Therefore, expanding to schools that have not been a part of the recruitment purview must be considered, more so, if those schools include the students who are often not represented in the applicant pool. While Rutgers University–New Brunswick does have the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program, a program directed at supporting students from low-income backgrounds, this cannot be one of the few sources from which the university admits admitted students of color, and more specifically, Black and Latino men.

Second, the opportunity to evaluate who is receiving messaging and information from each of unit and evaluate whether certain groups of students may need specialized messaging or outreach is another area to direct energy for student success. For example, having more aggressive academic and financial aid initiatives (Harper & Associates, 2014). These include increased marketing that focuses on obtaining aid to pay for college that is specifically targeted at Black and Latino men. While financial aid may not be specifically targeted at this student population, the language used, and advertising of financial aid can be more inclusive of their experiences. In this study, 13 of the 18 men interviewed identified as first-generation college students. Therefore, academic and financial aid resources must account how financial resources are communicated to first-generation college families of Black and Latino men. Additionally, resources such as internship opportunities, job placement, and how to apply to and acquire funding for graduate school, must be specifically targeted at Black and Latino men. There are institutional wide initiatives that focus on these different skill and knowledge development but there are specific experiences that must accounted for that one-size-fits-all initiatives fail to address. Nevertheless, communication to students who may not be aware of resources must shift if to truly be inclusive.

Third, support for Black and Latino men has continued to permeate strategic planning of higher education institutional practices and initiatives. As strategic priorities are brought to the forefront of offices and units at Rutgers to increase access to marginalized student populations, institutional leaders and staff must remember that Black and Latino men are not a monolithic community of students. There are nuances that undergirds their individual and collective experiences on campus that must take precedent in shaping how the institution supports Black and Latino men. Initiatives developed for this student population must be prioritized in both student affairs and academic affairs, including the division of enrollment management. Serving the needs of Black and Latino men must be done through cross-departmental collaborative efforts across the institution.

Despite deficit rhetoric surrounding Black and Latino men, students at Rutgers have managed to persist and graduate at higher rates than the national average. As Rutgers University–New Brunswick moves forward in advancing access and excellence, institutional administrators must continue to ask themselves, How does Rutgers University leverage the success of Black and Latino men to better inform the practices within different respective units? and How do divisions or departments develop these initiatives through a community informed praxis grounded in an anti-deficit framework? These and other questions must drive the conceptualization and analysis of how to build institutional capacity to support Black and Latino men at Rutgers University–New Brunswick.

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