BEYOND STATISTICS: AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE

PERSISTENCE IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I am a professor of developmental studies at Tulsa Community College, a multi-campus college that boasts of having more than 20,000 students annually attend the school. I teach writing, reading, and student success classes; I am completing my tenth year of full-time work at the college.

Each semester, I have kept a close eye on the attendance of my students. As an African American, I definitely notice how many African Americans are in my classes, being particularly aware that African American males are a highly under-represented group within community college classrooms (Alexander, 2004; Bailey, 2003; Gregg, 1989; Johnson-Bailey, Cervero, & Baugh, 2004; Malveaux, 2002; Malveaux, 2005; Palmer et al., 2010; Pope, 2006, p.210; Redden, 2009; Roach, 2001; Stein, 1996; Wilson, 2000; "Yes We Can," 2010). I mention to all of my students the importance of their attending classes regularly in order to be successful. My observed reality is that many of these students do not attend regularly. Of course, this both frustrates me and challenges me as I work to change this reality. The varied reasons for sporadic attendance range from having multiple jobs, lack of consistent transportation, to not having resources for completing homework, such as computer access, understanding the work, time to complete the homework, or textbooks. My conversations with peer faculty have revealed that their classroom observations have matched mine. This always has posed a question for me about the issue of retaining African American males from the beginning of the semester until the end of the semester—all the way to eventual graduation.

Although I regularly wonder why any student would fail to have consistent attendance for a class designed for his learning, I find myself particularly disturbed that many of the African American males I have observed seem to disappear from regular attendance early within the semester of a class. Many articles suggest social conditions, early childhood educational experiences, intraracial social interactions, or the criminal justice system as possible explanations for lack of persistence (Cuyjet, 2006; Stein, 1996), but I find this difficult to embrace since my childhood is not one of financial privilege or ideal social setting, yet I have navigated through family, financial, and educational challenges to persist. I do not accept that the explanations for the problems and solutions are so simple, so precise, so general. I think the complexity of the issue goes beyond the often-glib statements I have encountered, and I question what other African American males think of their own experiences. What do they see as the major factors that have held them back from completing their educational goals? What do they see as reasonable rationale for not showing up for a class? What would be sufficient explanation for them not finishing a college degree when they have invested so much of their time, money, and dreams into the pursuit of a degree?

My concern regarding African American males became increasingly more pronounced after I had attended a January 2007 conference for African American Student Government in Holly Springs, Mississippi. As I walked through the conference sessions, while I spoke with and observed presentations and participation of the African American students, I became increasingly more impressed with the leadership skills these students exhibited, along with the clear focus on success and overcoming obstacles that they tend to face in their pursuit to earn degrees. Most significantly, I observed a different, more

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focused, attitude among the African American males who were attending the conference: they were passionate about learning, passionate about their self-esteem, passionate about success. These elements, seemingly missing in a broader scale with my observations in my classes, painted a conflicting yet comforting contrast in attributes that further entrenched my interest in understanding what has been going on in the community college environment that perpetuates the lack of persistence for African American males. My interest is not so much in the generalities offered to explain the present situation of why African American male persistence in community colleges is low; instead, I have probed to understand the issue from a more specific, contextually developed perspective—an in-depth study—that helps me understand another African American male's viewpoint of what factors motivate him to persist. The direction I have chosen to address the quest is through a case study—a Qualitative Content Analysis case study of African American males who face (or have faced) barriers to persisting from semester to semester towards graduation with a community college degree.

Research Problem

The problem to consider in this research study is the low proportion of African American males in higher education in comparison to their male counterparts of other ethnic or racial backgrounds. More specifically, the research problem is to identify what African Americans consider as factors that impact persistence in the journey to persist in completing a college degree.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine, describe, and analyze African American male persistence factors at a community college in the midwest of the United States. The

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study is a qualitative case study with six African American male participants. The purpose of the study is to identify persistence characteristics for African American males in attaining a college degree. By better understanding the concerns and issues of African American males, possible teaching strategies and institutional practices can be adopted to respond to the perceived needs that African American males report as barriers to their completion of a community college education. The underlying purpose of identifying the challenges through qualitative content analysis is based on using a research method that provides a systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 2004; Weber, 1990). This content analysis is coupled with the Critical Pedagogy put forward by Paulo Freire (2002) that "unveiling that reality [of low persistence rates in higher education]" with a "co-intentional," partnered discussion and discovery opens the door for "committed involvement" with "the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation [from the barriers that they have lived and revealed]" (p. 69). This approach creates a "humanizing pedagogy" that empowers those who (may or may not know that they) are oppressed (p. 68). The goal is for both students and educators to understand, name, and act on the barriers or challenges to college success for African American males in a liberating manner that opens pathways to education.

Significance of the Study

Several articles, surveys, and reports ponder the question of "Where is the African American male in Higher Education" (Alexander, 2004; Bailey, 2003; Gregg, 1989; Johnson-Bailey, Cervero, & Baugh, 2004; Malveaux, 2002; Malveaux, 2005; Palmer et al., 2010; Pope, 2006, p.210; Redden, 2009; Roach, 2001; Stein, 1996; Wilson, 2000;

"Yes We Can," 2010). Not only are there fewer African American males and other males at all levels of education, but the gap continues to broaden between the number of African American males and other males within the United States who pursue education past the high school level (*US Census Bureau*, 2006), creating a shortage of representation at the college level, but also creating a shortage of qualified job applicants in the business and academic fields for the population (Roach, 2001). This obvious disparity of African American male representation at the higher education level creates a knowledge and economic rift between African American males and the rest of the population that systematically attend college.

Despite the current gap in retaining African American males in higher education, policies and procedures, as they relate to African Americans in general, point to a historically derived sentiment that the gap has been sufficiently addressed. Many educators and citizens feel that over 300 years of "racial segregation and exclusion from American colleges and universities has been corrected within the last three decades" (Anderson, 2002, p. 19). Specifically, "the majority [of citizens] … now believe that political and educational reforms during the past three decades have erased over three centuries of racial discrimination." Opposite this general sentiment, for African American males, the low representation in higher education continues to be an historical reflection of the legacy of centuries of policies and procedures of derived segregation and exclusion practices.

Some critics of African American male studies ask, "Why focus on African American males; is this problem not the same as it is with other males in higher education?" Research addresses this issue by pointing to the lower numbers of African

American males on campuses and their low numbers in comparison to their female counterparts: "Although the actual numbers of African Americans have been increasing through the 1990s … African American men represent a disproportionately small percentage of the total college population and a much smaller male versus female percentage than any other ethnic group" (Cuyjet, 1997, p. 14). While African American male numbers decrease in comparison to their female counterparts, the concern emerges that "it creates a pronounced imbalance between the numbers of college educated men and women, which may affect the dynamics and relationships between the members of the two groups" (Jones, 2002, p. 21). Additionally, educational critics point to the lower success rates of African American males as a societal form of a miner's canary (Guinier & Torres, 2002), suggesting that the systematic group failure of African American males points to the eventual failure of other groups in education and society—an issue that should alarm and concern all who experience any challenges in attaining educational success (Noguera, 2008, xxvii).

Research Question

What factors do African American males identify that help them persist in completing a community college education?

Sub-Questions

What do African American males find to be barriers to persistence in the pursuit of higher education?

What do African American males say they have done for themselves to persist in the pursuit of higher education?

What do African American males suggest that teachers do to help the African American males persist in the pursuit of higher education?

What do African American males suggest that institutions do to help African American males persist in the pursuit of higher education?

Limitations

- Due to the complexity of the conveyed situations presented by research participants, the written representation of some of their comments provides a mere glimpse into the lives of the participants, not fully capturing the whole story, but mainly providing a representative sample of the complex nature of the participants' lives.

- This qualitative content analysis case study provides a summarized version of the detailed responses provided by students during interviews and a focus group session, providing the researcher realization that revisiting of the data could reveal other issues and aspects of African American male persistence barriers.

- Since the study is content analysis and lends itself to including numeric representation for the data, some aspects of case study can be represented in numerical form, but much of it cannot, lending itself to the need for narrative examples and descriptive accounts over the often-precise data that emerges from quantitative data collection. Although the study is qualitative, the appearance of quantitative-like data requires that readers understand that the content analysis merely reflects a numeric way of sorting and representing the data in a manner that captures the number of times an item is mentioned, not necessarily the same as significance for a quantitative research design.

- Because six participants are used in the case study, no claims can be made to the generalizability of the study to the larger African American student populations, although the results may reveal emerging themes that have not been highlighted in previous research. Additionally, although the data may not lend itself to wide-scale generalizability, the persistence themes that ring true in the experiences of other African American males or observing college faculty and staff may be used as provisional guides in addressing common challenges faced by African American males.

Delimitations

- Intentionally, this study confined itself to interviewing and providing a focus group to African American males between the ages of 18-28 in order to isolate the possible differences related to multiple generations and maturity that would likely emerge for older students.

- Intentionally, this study did not attempt to compare or explain why the persistence numbers of African American females are higher than African American males because that effort is for separate research gathering and reporting.

Definition of Terms

For this study, the definitions are intended to provide a common language for the dissertation. The definitions will be used as a guide for the reader to understand the following terms in its use throughout this study.

African American (used interchangeably with Blacks). Persons of African descent born and educated in the United States in an educational environment not typically empowering to minority students (Banks, p. 17-20, 1999)

Critical Pedagogy Theory/Philosophy. The struggle for humanization that Paulo Freire promotes as a liberating pedagogy that occurs through naming of the oppressions and oppressors through ongoing dialogue that creates a cultural revolution that overturns oppressive societal and institutionalized practices (Freire, 2002)

Persistence. Student who overcomes the problem of dropout and departure tendencies in higher education by using specific actions (Tinto, p. 4, 1993)

Retention. Student who continues from semester to semester until degree completion (Tinto, p. 4, 1993)

Resilience. Overcoming life's obstacles by using factors of strength in choosing specific personal actions and attitudes, along with having the family, community, and educational support structures, to equip students to achieve long term educational aspirations in spite of the personal risk and adversity that distracts them from academic success (Benard, 1997)

Summary

Chapter 1 identifies the topic of this study regarding African American males to explore the challenges to persistence and the related persistence strategies that African American males apply in order to attain success in a community college. The study presents the challenges and issues related to the low proportion of African American males in higher education in comparison to their male counterparts of other ethnic or racial backgrounds, along with creating the overall setting for the study and the rest of the paper.

Additionally, Chapter 1 formally provides a statement of the problem and background information using literature and research studies for the project, clarifies the purpose and significance of the study, and defines the research question, along with identifying the limitations and delimitations of the study as well as the organization of the dissertation.

Organization of the Study

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. These five chapters present the shared barriers revealed by six African American males between the ages of 18 and 28 years in their pursuit of community college degree or certificate attainment. Additionally, these chapters identify any specific strategies or resources used by the students to persist or that they recommend for faculty and staff to help other African American males persist to graduation. The contents of each chapter are as follows:

Ch**apter 1** provides a statement of the problem and background information using literature and research studies for the project, clarifies the purpose and significance of the

study, and defines the research question, along with identifying the limitations and delimitations of the study as well as the organization of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 provides a review of existing and related literature on the community college experience, success factors, and the achievement gap for African American males. This chapter concludes with a discussion of applicable theories related to interpreting data within this study.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology used for the study beginning with a rationale for the methodology, along with an overview of case study and content analysis. The research design is presented next followed by the participant selection process and procedures for ensuring researcher ethical behavior and avoidance of bias.

Chapter 4 presents the data collected from the interviews. A description of the participants is provided for general background, along with a presentation and discussion of the themes that emerged in the study and the process used to ensure reliable interpretation of the themes from the data. Tables and figures assist with the presentation of the data.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of findings and the conclusions drawn from the questions and interpretation of the data based on the theoretical framework. Implications for future research and recommendations are offered based on the findings. Additionally, limitations are provided, along with concluding remarks.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To be an African American male student in a community college predicts the pathway of facing multiple success obstacles, facing often-overwhelming personal obstacles, and encountering significant academic deficiencies. The past decade includes multiple studies and reports that indicate the low enrollment and educational attainment of African American males in higher education? (Alexander, 2004; Bailey, 2003; Gregg, 1989; Johnson-Bailey, Cervero, & Baugh, 2004; Malveaux, 2002; Malveaux, 2005; Palmer et al., 2010; Pope, 2006, p.210; Redden, 2009; Roach, 2001; Stein, 1996; Wilson, 2000; "Yes We Can," 2010). Bush and Bush (2005) report that California community college data reveals that African American males are among the lowest performing subgroups based on semester-to-semester persistence rates, degrees earned, and overall grade point average. Why reference California community colleges? It is common to use the California system of community colleges as a measure of community colleges across the country for two reasons: using US Department of Education data ("Community Colleges," 2008), California's 111 colleges enrolled approximately 1.4 million students, representing nearly 23% of the nation's total enrollment of students in community colleges (p.5), indicating that one out of every four students enrolled in college in the United States is enrolled in a California.

Additionally, the California system uses the same open admission system as other community colleges across the country, indicating that the California colleges grapple with similar issues that other open admission institutions around the country face. These two traits of the California system make it a good sample for understanding the typical

challenges of the US community colleges. Further, when considering the student demographics for community colleges, the California student data parallels the data across the nation and, in particular, the demographics within the school for this study. The trend has been a steady decline of African American male enrollment in community colleges, increasing the gap between African American females with degrees and the white male counterparts for African American males. Current economic and social trends suggest that this cycle will continue unless strategic interventions take place by and for African American males who pursue community college education.

Four main bodies of literature speak to the relevant background related to this study. The first is an understanding of the African American male experience in community colleges. The second is success factors for African American males in higher education. The third is background on African American male achievement challenges/gaps in United States education, along with some of the recent efforts to address these challenges on a national level. Theoretical explanations for African American male experiences are the fourth body of literature relevant to the study. The theoretical explanation will address a research gap that identifies a theoretically supported approach for students and educators in how to respond to the issues and challenges African American males face in community colleges.

African American Male Experience in Community College

While African American males continue to strive for upward mobility through higher education, the words penned in 1903 by W.E.B. DuBois (2006) capture the unique challenges faced by African American males as they face a dual conflict of self-realization in the world of academia. The challenges of navigating within the community

college environment are not only difficult for males but also perplexing to understand for educators and supporting staff and administrators who want to assist African American males:

> The [African American male] is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,--a world which yields him no true self consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels this twoness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 9)

The world of African American male community college students includes reconciling values from a social community that may differ significantly from the values that are needed for student success in higher education. The struggle rests upon how African American males find a sense of identity, a critical factor for their community college success (Bonner & Bailey, 2006, p. 33-34). This positive self esteem is further known to help build resiliency among students in at-risk groups (Finn & Rock, 1997).

While US education appears to be at its most accessible numbers for those who desire to attend a higher education institution, the striking disparity of African American males who fail to choose an academic career remains a mystery. Not only are there few African American males at all levels of education, but the gap continues to broaden between the number of African American males and other males within the United States

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who pursue education past the high school level (US Census Bureau, 2006), creating a shortage of representation at the college level, but also creating a shortage of qualified job applicants in the business and academic fields for the population (Roach, 2001).

Community colleges have provided American citizens, especially minority students, an opportunity to pursue higher education for well over one hundred years. According to the latest *Minorities in Higher Education: 2011 Supplement,* while approximately 30% of African American males between the ages of 18 to 24 are enrolled in college, 42% of their white counterparts are enrolled. This gap between racial groups is compounded by black females of the same age group being enrolled at a 41% rate. The significance of these differences is that black males are consistently outpaced by their female counterparts of the same race and their male counterparts of a different race— both in the classroom and with the potential for degree attainment and potential earning and career choices for the future job acquisition.

Another significant trend reported in the 2011 supplement of the *Minorities in Higher Education* report is that African American men no longer achieve a much higher level of education than their past generations, while "[y]oung white men achieved about the same level of education as older age groups" (p.1). This trend demonstrates how African American males, who were already earning fewer degrees and in lower attendance in higher education (Alexander, 2004; Bailey, 2003; Gregg, 1989; Johnson-Bailey, Cervero, & Baugh, 2004; Malveaux, 2002; Malveaux, 2005; Palmer et al., 2010; Pope, 2006, p.210; Redden, 2009; Roach, 2001; Stein, 1996; Wilson, 2000; "Yes We Can," 2010), are further slipping in comparison to their past generations and their white male counterparts. Possible ramifications of this slippage in educational attainment

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relates to influence of earning power based on the shift by racial divides. Based on research by Johnson and Neal (1998), the equalizing factor for annual wages earned between African Americans and Whites is college graduation. The slowing trend in graduation rates for African American males provides increased concern regarding future earning potential and increased widening of the economic gap between the groups based on the educational divide.

With the general climate of disproportionate presence in the college classroom for African American males, the interaction with the institutions of higher education come laced with a variety of other issues—one of them of self-esteem. The traditional college climate that African American males encounter does not lend itself to promoting positive self esteem based on a trend that started much earlier in the educational system, one that placed more African American males in special education classes (Allen, 2010; Finkel, 2010; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Herrera, 1998), along with disproportionally being more likely to be physically disciplined, suspended, expelled, or forced to repeat a grade. (Billings, 2011; Losen, 2011). When African American males encounter the college classroom, the disproportionately high placement in remedial classes (Lewis, 2010; Palmer, et al., 2009) coupled with the often-lower teacher expectations of their abilities (Harper, 2009; Yates, et al 2008) does not instill the overall self esteem that students generally need to overcome the many obstacles that are part of the college experience. The lower expectations further challenges self esteem of African American males in that some teachers may not demand or expect the same caliber of work that is demanded for college success from the students once expectations have dropped. Encountering multiple instructors who expect less is a negative self-esteem factor that African

American males must grapple with in their pursuit of higher education. This ongoing reality becomes the socialization of the African American male experience in college.

A long recognized function of education is socialization (Gruman & Saks, 2011; Padgett, et al, 2010; Woodland, 2005). This ongoing socializing continues to the college environment in which the African American males find themselves disproportionately represented in remedial classes, and sparingly represented in the engineering, math, science, and honors classrooms that tend to be associated with the "hard" classes within higher education (Cross, 2006; Lewis, 2010; Nelson, 2006; Palmer, et al., 2009; Riegle-Crumb & King, 2010; Yohannes-Reda, 2010). Continued overrepresentation in remedial classes and underrepresentation in the "hard" college courses lends itself to ongoing stereotypes that this group of males lacks the capacity to learn at the same rate as their counterparts of other races. As the trend continues, one must question existing theories of learning and instruction that have not helped to improve the academic performance of the African American male population, thus perpetuating the stereotypes that portray the group as slow learners or as not inclined to participate in the "hard" college courses.

Another concern that affects the African American male experience on college campuses is the low representation of faculty of color, particularly African American male faculty (Alexander & Moore, 2008; American Federation of Teachers, 2010; Strayhorn, 2008). Because students do not see more faculty of color, the issues of not having mentors or role models becomes a potential challenge for the students. Additionally, the African American male students have fewer examples of what it means to give back to a community since they have seen few examples in their academic careers of how other African American males have achieved success and are returning to school

organizations and local communities to share their expertise or success with those who are younger and experiencing similar challenges that the role model has had to overcome in order to achieve success. The lack of representation creates a void in both the lives of students but also the communities from which the students come since the role models are scarce. And it makes it difficult for the students to establish how they should become role models for those who are younger and need mentoring.

Success Factors for African American Males in Higher Education

While the challenges and deficiencies for African American males have become common discussion points for research and societal concerns, the fact remains that many African American males do achieve success in spite of the many challenges they must overcome in the academic environment that exist in today's higher educational climate. Several studies speak to the success of African American males in both predominately white institutions (Perrakis, 2008; Robertson & Mason, 2008; Wood, 2010; Wood & Turner, 2011) and in historically black universities (Palmer & Young, 2009; Peters, 2007; Ross, 1998). Significant factors emerge within the studies that are worthy of noting, such as some studies defining criteria of success to be semester persistence toward eventual graduation, while other studies focus on grade point average. Although these essential differences existed among some of the studies, some significant success factors emerged: family support, self-esteem, academic self-concept, faculty encouragement, direct outreach to males by college institutions and staff, and stable external relationships.

Additionally, several studies report what has worked for African American male success in college ("African American Males in College Report," 2009; Cuyjet, 2006; Garibaldi, 2007; Jones, 2001). Following are a few factors that the literature already

reports as strategies to help African American males achieve success: mentoring programs; fostering peer groups/communities among African American males; Black male support groups that function much like a freshman seminar; fostering a strong family support structure; encouraging hospitable faculty classroom and institutional environments, promoting more interaction of faculty and staff of the same gender, cultural, ethnic, and racial background; moving from competitive to cooperative classroom environments; creating student activities on campus that are attractive to African American males, such as more intramural athletics, exercising, playing video games, basketball and other sports; opportunity to perform as rappers, partying, showing off material possessions (such as clothes and shoes); leadership opportunities that involve relationships with key administrators at the college and meeting celebrities and dignitaries; scholarships; and internships.

Additionally, Tinto (1993), noted student persistence researcher, provides a frame for both the institution and the individual students in identifying factors that point to success. For students, Tinto points to commitment and intention, indicating that students who have a higher commitment level for an educational or career goal are more likely to achieve college success because of an overall willingness to work for and sacrifice in order to achieve the goal. Additionally, he notes that individuals who have a real intention of graduation defines the essential variable that should be identified in determining success or failure. Unfortunately, however, this is a variable that is never known when colleges label students as not succeeding—the general term associated with not persisting to graduation. Some students have enrolled in school for reasons such as improving GPA, testing the college experience, or taking credit hours with intentions to

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transfer. Intention and commitment are linked and critical in understanding how successful a student will be.

When considering the retention issues for African American males, these factors need to be understood within the context of institutional variables that Tinto presents: adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation. While adjustment refers to transitions to college setting from past backgrounds to learning the protocols and norms, difficulty tends to refer to the academic challenges that students face, incongruence tends to refer to the disconnect of expectations and social or academic practices at an institution, and isolation points to the all-alone sentiments that students often feel when they are cast into an environment that may not appear welcoming. And the perception of not feeling welcome is all that matters for the purposes of success factors. In understanding the institutional and individual factors for success, the critical need is in understanding specific behaviors that lead a committed African American male to have intention, while also understanding how perception of the four institutional factors of adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation become sources of either encouragement toward or away from college success.

While some ponder whether students should bear the brunt of responsibility for success or failure in pursuit of higher education, a developmental approach presumes that most students lack the maturity or skills to follow the best path for success when the barriers are so numerous. More importantly, a developmental, supportive institution considers how to alter a common path that often has been clouded by years of public instruction that may have included low teacher expectations, underfunded classroom

support for academic competitiveness, and a family support structure that has no background in navigating the higher education maze.

While the research indicates that students who have been most successful are those who have been able to participate in the previously mentioned support features for success, such as mentoring, strong peer groups, and time with top-ranking college officials, the challenge is that these types of programs are not always a purposeful effort that institutions of higher education make available to African American males, but the males encounter these support networks serendipitously (Harper, 2012). Through a more focused effort that is institutionalized, administrators, faculty and students who know what work will be equipped to direct more African American males to programs, such as GEAR UP or Summer bridge programs between high school and college that allow students to be more intentional and committed to college success because they know their academic and personal strengths that will lead to overall success. From an institutional perspective, support from concerned mentors or those who are aware of the social disparities of the educational achievements of African American male communities also offers a variety of strategies that have been used to help this population achieve additional success, beginning well before students enter college and working with these students throughout the whole college process as navigators.

African American Male Achievement Challenges in United States Education

In approaching the research for this study, an important acknowledgement is that the heightened alarm for the disparities in educational achievement for African American males did not begin in the last decade or even in the last five decades. The conditions for the current plight of African American males has been a result of several societal trends

spanning centuries of racially laced perspectives of marginalization or social inequalities that must be understood in order to appreciate the need for focused institutionalized, community, and individual response in order to reverse the shameful pattern. One important concern is that 2002 numbers indicate black men have the same enrollment percentages as in 1976, a small 4.3% (Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2010), a number that certainly should have increased over the years and represents a significant gap when compared to African American females and male peers of other races. Beyond enrollment, 2010 US Census Bureau data indicates the gap continues (see Table 2.1), with black males receiving 4.2% of the associate degrees conferred in the country, still lagging behind their black female counterparts at community colleges and much more behind white males.

Table 2.1 Percentage Black Males to All Males and Black Females

	Associate Degree	**Percentage**
Black Males	838	4.2% of all students
White Males	6899	34.9% of all students
Black Females	1451	7.3% of all students
All Students	19740	

Note. Adapted from 2010 US Census Bureau data report

From an academic historical perspective, Anderson (2002) points to 1636 as critical starting point of the racial crisis in American higher education, with the founding of Harvard University (p. 3). He contends that the exclusion of African Americans from higher education set the precedent for a society that deemed higher education an entitlement for whites, not African Americans. This social separation based on race has

plagued both the American society and higher education since these early days.

Certainly, this isolation of African Americans was passed along to other groups, thus

creating an atmosphere in the American educational system that race dictates academic

attainment and aspiration. Of course, in a slave-laden society, challenges to educational

goals relate mainly to access. Those who have access receive the advantages of

education, and those who do not have access are denied the skills and information to help

move themselves beyond the barriers that an education may equip them to extract. Since

access had been denied in these institutions of higher education, African Americans who

dared to aspire toward lofty academic goals in higher education were not only

discouraged but considered malcontents or rebels for the social system that had been

established.

Anderson further explores an underlying philosophy espoused by David Hume in

1748 that guided the decisions to restrict African American males and females from

higher education:

> I am apt to suspect the Negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for
>
> there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the Whites. There
>
> never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than White, nor even any
>
> individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers
>
> among them, no arts, no science. (p. 3)

This sentiment was considered the norm and legal decision and academic achievement

was limited based on this perception of human difference. The irony of course is that the

data speak to the cultural achievements of those of African descent that date back to

Ancient Civilization (Brooks, 1992; Ehret, 2002; Parker & Rathbone, 2007), representing

vast intelligence, wealth, and accomplishment that remain milestones of human pursuit of greatness. That the American system limited this group based on philosophical perspectives speaks to the magnitude of the racial crisis in American higher education that remains to this day.

Another significant historical point that captures the institutional aspects of the racial gap in American higher education rests in how states systematically restricted the age level to elementary school for which African American students were allowed to be educated (Anderson, 2002, p. 78-109). This horrific limitation was compounded by school district practices that ensured that African American schools were consistently put in a position of inferior quality by maintaining inferior buildings, used books or no books at all, teachers with lower educational attainment, fewer school days, and less academic rigor in comparison to their White counterpart schools (Anderson, 1995; Williams, 2005; Woodson, 2011).

While Anderson's research focuses on the historical inequities within the racially divided academic setting, additional research points to factors in the 20th century and over the last 30-50 years that have plagued the American educational system, creating a gap in educational attainment for all African Americans, but particularly males in this group. Continued gaps, left unaddressed, do not lead to a stronger America or cultural group. Instead, the widening gap further reduces the potential accomplishments of all Americans since history reflects the many contributions of African American males to the US society, such as in scientific, business, sports, and entertainment. Reduced achievement for this African American male group reduces the international potential for commerce, social relationships, and collaborative projects with those from diverse backgrounds that

may not be willing to work with a society that lacks the diversity of achievement and perspective.

The achievement gap for race that continues to undermine the educational institutions with the United States is one that Ladson-Billings (2006) compares to economic deficit that requires attention from all segments of society, since it is something created by a societal, institutionalized practice and must be resolved by institutional remedies. She further adds that once improvements are made by one group, the progress of the other groups move as well, noting that using a static line for comparison is faulty since groups progress over time, not back in time, so progress is an ongoing struggle toward a system that improves constantly, not based solely on old benchmarks that may no longer be relevant for measurement.

In considering the black male specifically, one pertinent consideration in understanding the challenges of the group is what has been cast as the "Cool Pose," a common response for black males in making sense of their realities in a way that helps them garner a sense of self-esteem in what is often perceived as an unfriendly, unwelcoming environment (Kunjufu, 1988; Majors & Billison, 1993). This form of self-expression may lead itself to school misbehavior, acting like education does not matter, or not wanting to be the smartest student in the class, all forms of anti-conformists response to the intentions of good education. Majors and Billison coined the phrase "Cool Pose" because it seems to have emerged out of sense of pride in being popular and part of the in crowd that has somehow managed to overcome the oppressions of society or history, but unfortunately the behaviors also often lead to school dropout, poor performance on tests, drug usage, and violence, all items that further lead to an

achievement gap that is far from the "cool-ness" that leads to the success that would be appreciated in mainstream society. The result is a subculture of "cool-ness" that relegates academic achievement to a status associated with nerds or other marginalized groups within the black male crowd, such as those who are gay or not considered part of the in-crowd of the community. Unfortunately, though, the "Cool Pose" tends to promote the very isolating tendencies that mark black males as underachievers and widen the gap that needs to be shortened.

Although Tinto's Theory of Student Retention (1993) is limited in regard to African American males since his work focuses more on white culture due to the smaller number of African American males available within the predominantly white institutions, research (Harper, 2008; Roberson, 2010) continues to support his retention theories that success in higher education has more commonality among student populations than differences. Tinto's work has an advantage of being based on longitudinal studies that allow him to follow students over time and search for the commonalities that exist beyond race, gender, and culture, rather than some of the typical studies that search for a snapshot in time that must compare differences in success. In Tinto's longitudinal work, he is able to observe both the ongoing individual and institutional factors that influence student success, allowing for a more realistic picture that can be used as vehicle in understanding how to address the needs of African American males. Rather than focusing on the problem of dropouts, Tinto promotes understanding students' intentions and commitment prior to determining what actions the institution should take, pointing out that a grave mistake is made when institutions presume that every enrolled student

plans to persist (Tinto, 139-145). Tinto creates a new paradigm that needs to be placed

within the context of the "Cool Pose," Student Intention, and Institutional Responsibility.

When the institution can somehow ascertain that students have the intention of

persistence, then the institution has both the ethical and practical ingredients to evaluate

effectiveness of student progress in higher education (See figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 Student Intentions Defining Student Success
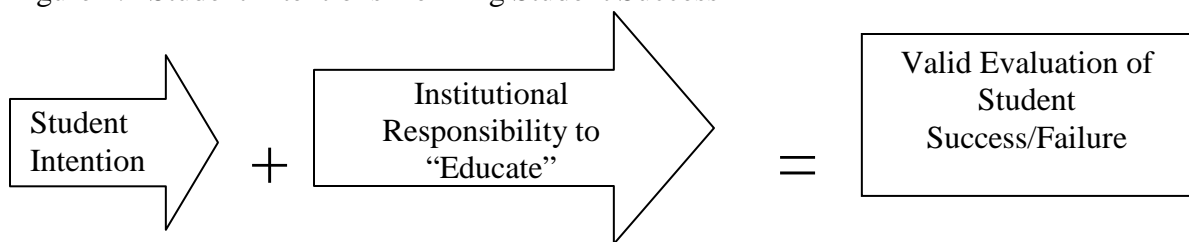
Many of the retention policies within institutions, Tinto points out, base their

effectiveness on all student entries, not factoring in the students' role in the process. This

is a common error that plagues many of our educational programs on both national and

local levels. Certainly, an extreme that should be avoided is one that presumes that the

intentions are not present. Tinto does not suggest this as a probability. In fact, when

considering retention as an issue, Tinto promotes looking at things by reviewing the long

term practices of successful institutions, not just the specific programs that may have

been successful (p. 148).

Additionally, when considering the students of color and the attempt to address

achievement gaps, Tinto promotes institutional support of specific efforts that target

students of color, along with institutional efforts that work toward helping students of

color become part of the mainstream work of the institution, not just worked on by a few

faculty or staff in a corner or small off-site office that marginalizes the students. When

the efforts are shared, Tinto points out, just as Ladson-Billing notes in the deficit model

of the achievement gap analogy, students have a broad support system and welcoming

culture that fosters success, not isolation and resistance.

Theoretical Explanations for African American Male Experiences

In considering the African American Male college experience for this research

project, several theories were considered as frameworks in positioning the analysis of

data. In the following pages, I will present four frameworks (phenomenology, critical

race theory, black feminism, and Freire's critical pedagogy) considered as possible lenses

for interpreting the data from the study. Please note that in the following section I will

first present a typical scene in a classroom, and I will then interpret the scene through the

four lenses as if the lenses represent different worlds or perspectives, allowing for

different interpretations.

In light of current U.S. Department of Education statistics from the U.S. Census

Bureau survey from 2010, with analysis indicating that 33.1% of African American male

men graduate from college (compared with 44.8% of African American females, and

57.3% for all students), consider the following scene and how it speaks to the reality of

the African American male's disconnectedness from the learning community while in

pursuit of a degree in higher education:

Student Scene

After the writing teacher [a middle-aged white female] made sure the

students' computers were working in the computer lab, she walked them through

logging on to the computers and finding the online discussion area that contained

the questions for the work. She walked to each computer and helped students who seemed to have difficulty logging on or navigating within the site.

The African American male, sitting about midway in the room from the front of the class, found the site, navigating through the online log in process quickly, suggesting that he had frequently logged on to the site and had a familiarity with the format for the class site. As the instructor walked through the class to provide explanation to other students, the student started responding to the computer prompts with seeming ease, so the teacher just passed by him, asked if he had any questions [he shook his head to indicate he had no questions], and she left him on his own since he appeared to have no problem with navigating through the site.

The African American female student, on the other hand, sitting further back in the room, told her surrounding peers, "I have never been on one of these lap top computers, so somebody needs to help me get started." As a result, one of her neighboring students guided her through the log in and navigation process. By the time the instructor reached the African American female's computer station, the student had found and started the work, so she needed no assistance from the instructor. As the instructor made it to this student's area, the female gestured with her hands and with her head motioned that she was all right for the moment; the teacher smiled and gave a look that acknowledged that she understood that this may have been a temporary understanding. The teacher commented, "Let me know if you need help later," and then the teacher moved on to help other students.

The scene represents a typical day in a class at a community college. On the surface, no major problems emerge, but a more careful reading of the scene reveals several possible interpretations. Four possible views of the scene follow, presented as if the scenes were in four different classrooms.

The Phenomenology Lens

When considering the scene from the Phenomenology lens, the focus is on understanding the "essence," the "basic characteristics" of a scene or series of events to understand better the experiences of individuals or groups. Nel Noddings (1998) provides a brief explanation of the intentions of phenomenological study:

> We do not lay on our own structures, nor do we assimilate what the other says [or does] as a mere bit of information. We feel what the other is going through. Indeed, Simone Weil said that the implicit question we ask as we attend in this way is, "What are you going through?" … Second as we receive what is there in the other, we feel our energy flowing toward the other's predicament or project. We want to relieve a burden, activate a dream, share a joy, or clear up a confusion. Temporarily, our own projects are put aside; we are caught up by an internal "I must" that pushes us to respond to the other. (p. 67)

From this lens of examining "burdens," "dreams," "joys," and "confusions," we can explore the student scene from one day in a class for revealed meanings that address specific concerns of African American males. Can the scene be explored from the standpoint of African American females, teachers, or other students? Yes. Yet, this is not the goal for this particular study; a phenomenological study of understanding the

30

experiences of African American males is the focus of examining the scenes from this class period—the Lens of Phenomenology.

First, the teacher progresses through the class, providing individualized attention to students who encounter difficulties navigating through the assignment using the online site, the class Internet forum that houses course documents, discussion areas, daily assignment records, course syllabus, and homework submission areas. The African American male, because he understands how to navigate, receives little time or attention from the teacher. On the surface this is a positive thing because it suggests that he has come to class prepared for work. This may or may not be true; the teacher has only assessed that he can navigate through the online course area of the site that houses the prompts. It is unclear and unknown if his responses are valid for the prompts within the lesson. Disconnectedness. In fact, it could be possible that the African American male student merely knows how to locate and navigate within the system and inevitably makes errors in judgment and logic that reveal his lack of understanding of the reading.

The teacher's actions reveal more about the need for the students to be "doing something," rather than the students to be "learning something." Perhaps that was the goal of the day. Is that what the teacher has intended or is that simply what makes the class flow more smoothly? I believe the latter possibility produces a preferred outcome for the needs of the teacher's class for the day. If the focus were on learning, the questions asked from the teacher would be different and the student's ability to navigate through the course site would not be the focus of the day. A different question, such as, "Have you found how question three relates to your research topic you selected for the

next two weeks?" This type of question helps the students make connections to learning beyond the current assignment.

Another area of interest for this Phenomenology perspective is the apparent commitment the teacher makes to returning to and assisting students. The teacher only commits, on a personal level that assures students of ultimate support, to helping students who have expressed difficulty. When the African American male student appears to navigate well through the course site, he is neither assured that the teacher will return to check on him, nor is he provided any support that he is on the right track—if indeed he genuinely is on the right path for class. Disconnectedness. This ambiguous area of assurance leaves the African American male with the need to establish, in terms of Maslow's Hierarchy, his own third and fourth levels of confirmation that he is doing a good job—love and esteem (Moustakas, 1994; Sokolowski, 2000; Sokolowski, 2008). Specifically, the African American male need for "acceptance" and "recognition" can be more explicitly stated by the teacher if the student indeed is modeling the student behavior he needs.

These two levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs are deficient in the classroom experiences presented for the day, not promoting the atmosphere most conducive to leading the student to self-actualization, an independent mode of learning in which the student operates out of a recognition of his or her potential. Continued encounters with not meeting such needs may compel the student to search for meeting these levels outside of the classroom, perhaps even negate the importance and interest level the student has in the class because those needs remain unmet on a daily basis. Disconnectedness.

Returning to some of the fundamental purposes of phenomenology, the subject of African American males and their "burdens," "dreams," "joys," and "confusions" is important to examine in this classroom. This student seems to have the burden of insufficient affirmation. Disconnectedness. The encounter does not seem to reveal areas of dreams or joys, although confusion seems to be the goal to avoid for this class day. Again, the delayed understanding of what is to be learned for the day leaves the student unaware if he has demonstrated the subject-matter mastery he needs for the day's content. The student seems to have avoided a label of confusion for today since he could easily navigate through the online course system, but it is unclear if he has any confusion regarding the entries he makes within site. Analysis of this work will be reserved until later when his work is compared to other students and to the assigned readings about which he is responding to for his course work.

Critical Race Theory Lens

Examining the scene from Critical Race Classroom, the focus engages the reader in considering the interpretation from the perspective of "reproducing" power structures, political agendas, and social conditions. Noddings' (1998) explanation of Critical Theory provides a framework that allows a more skeptical reading of the student scene:

> [Critical theorists] are concerned with political freedom and dignity, and their focus is real, historically situated human beings … analyzing the social conditions that underlie, accompany, and result from forms of domination …. [recognizing that] the structures of schooling and classroom discourse correspond directly to the class structures of society and that this correspondence explains how the school "reproduces" the society's class structure. (p. 68-69)

The teacher, a middle-aged white female, is part of the tradition of US education, while the African American male student has been an interrupter, an outsider, an intruder in a public institution not originally designed for individuals from his culture. Disconnectedness. From the Critical Race Theory aspect, what elements of the actions from the student scene reflect the "reproducing" power structures, political agendas, and social conditions?

Reproduced are the traditional lesson plan formats—Madeline Hunter, for one, dominates the plan for this class. The teacher has modeled the expected usage of the course site and has brought the class to a computer lab for guided practice of what has been modeled. She has focused on a specific skill for the class to attain. These Madeline Hunter models may appear wonderful on the surface, but how do they perpetuate institutional problems or societal inequities for African American males? First, with continued focus on the skill of navigation through the site, ignored are critical thinking skills related to the readings for the class. Ignored is the Conversational Learning (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2002) that can occur through experiential learning from engaged student and teacher exchanges. Ignored are the needs for the students to be accepted as learners, with the teacher being the force of unconditional acceptance and love. Ignored are the four centuries of the affects of slavery on the learning experiences and group interactions of class members. And ignored are the media images that bombard the African American males each day, perpetuating an atmosphere of irresponsibility, distrust, and anger.

Not that any one scene can address all of the possible institutionally ingrained problems, but analysis of the scene represents one day, one class, one impression, that becomes more profound once the actions are repeated in more classes by other teachers,

with other students, in other schools, repeatedly. With continued re-enactment of this scene, the gap in understandings and knowledge may continue to widen between African American males and their peers, along with the understanding from their teachers. Disconnectedness.

Another important component related to the student scene is the political aspect. The students had to be taken from their classes to a computer lab in order to have access to the computers. Preference is afforded to teachers with classrooms other than those who teach writing. As a result, the teacher and the students have access issues related to the politics of the college, the politics of society. In general, math, science, and computer teachers have the computer-equipped rooms, while the writing teachers have to beg for an opportunity to provide an in-class computer session. This disenfranchisement forces both the students and teachers to lag behind in overall skills, affecting all the students to the point of needing merely to focus on navigating through the course website, rather than having a comfort level with the items that results in their in depth focus on critical thinking skills related to the assigned task. Another political consideration is the teaching method selection adopted by the teacher. She classifies the Madeline Hunter method as genuine teaching, yet it only scratches the surface of the needs related to African American male students who need validation, affirmation, and purpose in life. Disconnectedness. The Hunter model addresses skills, but does not address the social acceptance needs of the African American male.

Finally, as it relates to social conditions, the day represented a reliance on technology to express ideas and to create connection with the assigned text. Perhaps the African American male in this scenario felt comfortable with his communications on the

computer, but the experiential aspects of learning which are common in the African

American community are ignored within this setting. Disconnectedness. It is the African

American female who exposes this reference related to experiential learning, a learning

style that relies upon a community of shared learning in order to achieve the individual

goals. Although the African American male appears to have been learning, the delayed

aspects of the feedback that will occur from the website input does not allow observation

of whether he has understood what is needed for the class regarding the assigned text.

Feminist Theory, Specifically Black Feminism Lens

With Feminist Theory Lens, several layers of thought surface that provide a

variety of interpretations that intersect in the area of gender. A major area of thought is

postmodern in approach, a dwelling in which "most claims to universality, the traditional

notion of objectivity, the search for the capital-T Truth and certainty, and the creation of

the 'grand narratives'" are rejected (Noddings, 1998, p. 183). Colliding head on with this

line of thought is another intersecting area of feminist thought, Black Feminism:

> Instead of just judging claims … prefer[s] to ask who is speaking … [putting] the
>
> emphasis on the experiential credentials of the speaker/knower and
>
> correspondingly less on the speaker's argument … its force is judged in part by
>
> the passion of expression and the commitment of the speaker, not solely by its
>
> internal logic. (Noddings, 1998, p. 183)

Angela Davis, noted feminist and critical theorist, adding to the intersecting areas of

thought related to feminist theory, presents the intersection that "Black Feminism does

not belong to one group, one gender … [and that] leaders should develop a strong

feminist approach, regardless of whether [he or she be] man or woman" (Iowa State

University, African American Student Government Big XII Conference, February 25, 2006). As a result, the intersection for viewing the class scene is black feminist theory.

The two blacks in the room, one male, one female, have different constructs for learning. The male, more technically savvy, continues with his work, unmonitored, unsupported, unquestioned. The female, on the other hand, struggles through the technology, acknowledging her deficiencies, moves along in the class, but is connected to the social setting: she receives assistance from peers. She receives nodding gestures of support from her instructor. She has, through the creation of the setting, established a supporting network that will provide assistance for her through the current and future classes. Why is her interaction different, and why does the male not choose to apply similar techniques for improved social networking? Exploring African American male tendencies suggests that the actions taken by the female would not prove to be as productive for African American males, who tend to learn best when an atmosphere of personal responsibility is created (Hunter, 1999). Reliance on others is not one of the likely trademarks that the African American male will do immediately, unless the teacher does as Hunter suggests:

> Encourage unity through doing things together. Create study groups where [males] can learn to solve difficult problems as a group. Assign a task that cannot be accomplished without group participation. Do not allow them to accept failure as meaning that they should give up. (p. 18)

When placed in contrast to the African American female, the surface appearance of the classroom's experience is that she is more closely tied to the community of learners than the male because she embraces the community for support, while the African American

male isolates himself and works independently, without any reliance on peers or the instructor for the day's task. Disconnectedness. The adjusted understanding, when considering some of the suggested ways of teaching African American males, is that he may not have been adequately prepared to use all of the resources available to him to be successful in a group of peers who could become a community of learners. Even if he understands the content for the day, the possibility looms that he may not have fully understood the assignment, may not have given complete answers for the assignment, yet he was not checked on these understandings prior to his independent work. In fact, the teacher never gives him the same level of support that she offers to the African American female who is assured that she can ask for future help when needed. Instead, the African American male is left with a faulty assurance that he is doing fine, with no initial data inspection to validate the assumption. This tendency, left unchecked, will create a false sense of assurance for the African American male, and an increasingly frustrated reality for an instructor who has to deal with an African American male who believes he understands something and does not.

Freire Critical Pedagogy Lens

When considering the scene from critical pedagogy perspective of Freire (2002), the focus shifts to defining the specific practices that oppress the African American male (and his instructor), whether the actions are intended to be oppressive or not. Reality, for the African American male, may include oppressive, institutional practices that need to be exposed and defined by the African American male as he reflects over his own learning and comes to understand its underlying oppressive patterns:

[T]he pedagogy of the oppressed [is] a pedagogy which must be forged *with,* not

for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to

regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of

reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary

engagement in the struggle for their liberation. And in the struggle this pedagogy

will be made and remade. (Freire, p. 46)

In order to liberate the student and his instructor from the oppressive aspects of the

traditional educational environment, the veil of ignorance that the student needs to take

charge of his education, his reflection of his learning, and his critical understanding of his

lack of community connection is both a challenge for the student and the teacher. Neither

realize that this institutional, classroom affirmed practice is a form of oppression that

needs to highlighted, defined, exposed for its oppressive nature, and rectified by the

student.

The instructor is incapable of guiding the student in this process because she is

part of the oppression, but once both realize and alter the patterns that have perpetuated

the patterns of institutionalized classroom oppression, they will both be on the road to

liberation (Freire, p. 47). The "humanizing" (p. 42) search that the African American

male faces is one to fully find who he is, his potential, his connection to both his peers

(and instructor) in his classroom and their common goal to achieve success and his

human self that is part of broader, societal achievement that is part of a whole that is not

in an isolated vacuum that does not rely on the strengths of the whole to elevate those

who have been unaware of the misery that has confined their existence.

The African American male can pinpoint exact moments when his conforming to stereotypes and limited achievement occur in his classroom performance by noting when he fails to understand how the class material fits in with his growth. In partnership, his instructor can challenge him to define and analyze these moments so that they both become vehicles in this process of self-reflection, dialogue, and liberation (Freire, p. 42) toward a liberation that touches on both the historical institutionalizing education that perpetuates in the classroom and the humanizing elements that can unite both the oppressed and the oppressor in a common task to emancipate themselves.

Further background to critical pedagogy is detailed in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2002), in which he presents a thought-provoking analysis of how modern-day educational practices, similar to the scene in the classroom for this example, contradict the very goals they claim to foster, such as self-reliance, freedom of thought, and understanding. Freire contends that pedagogical practices promote a continuing system of oppression that cannot be broken unless the methods, approaches, and philosophies are understood, discussed, and changed from the inside—by the oppressed.

A critical concept that Freire promote is dialogics, "the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world" and "impose itself as the way by which [people] achieve significance as human beings" (p. 88). Dialogics is the process that focuses on the "conquest of the world for liberation of human kind" (p. 89). In this dialogue, each individual must bring a thought, a personal exchange that is contributed to the discussion of liberation. Freire points out that "this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's 'depositing' ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas 'consumed' [reference to Freire's idea of "banking" of knowledge from one person

to another] by the discussants" (p. 89). Because each person has thoughts of how to name the situation of which they exist, the common exchange allows them to identify and name each other's observations as well as expand upon the generative themes that allows them to have a common bond.

The dialogue changes the oppressor and the oppressed roles of the subjects in the world, labeling and changing the world through their enlightened situations. Within this dialogue, Freire points out that the dialogue of dialogics be prefaced with love: "Dialogue cannot exist, however in the absence of profound love for the world and for people … Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialoge itself" (p. 89). Freire contends that dialogue, as the search for deeper understanding that leads to more fully human existence, is representative of the love of humanity and is action of love because it produces the needed understanding that leads to the reflective teaching that constantly reflects over classroom and educational practices that oppress and need to be changed for the sake of liberation, with change coming from the teacher as oppressor, along with the teacher and the oppressed in the naming of the oppression.

When absorbing the naming and dialogic aspects of Freire's Critical Pedagogy, the intersection of the theories can be permitted in the zone of love that Freire creates as essential in order to have a dialogue. In the genuine concern for students and marginalized groups, an instructor should constantly reflect over classroom and institutional practices that seem to perpetuate stereotypes, gaps, and inadequacies in learning situations. With this reflection, educators are also charged to engage the oppressed students, the African American male for this case, in a dialogue that moves

him to a realization that his oppression can be overturned in the labeling and restructuring

of his situation.

Summary

This review has discussed the relevant literature on the major defining components related to the study. The chapter first provides a review of existing and related literature on the community college experience for African American males, detailing the multiple studies that discuss the low enrollment numbers for African American males in comparison to their female counterparts and their white peers, thus contributing to the self-esteem issues faced by this group and widening the achievement gap such that this group is the lowest performing group of all college-going populations. The college experience part of the chapter also discusses the lack of representation within higher education of people who look like African American males, thus creating a role model challenge for the group.

The chapter continues by identifying success factors that students and institutions have used that help to foster success among African American males. Additionally, Tinto's research regarding intention and commitment for individuals, along with four institutional variables adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation, are discussed as vehicles to help students persist.

In regard to the achievement gap, this chapter discusses the historical factors that have contributed to the achievement gap, along with some of the social and institutional practices that have led to an ongoing achievement gap for African American males. The achievement gap is also discussed in how it remains relevant to Tinto's Theory of student retention, in spite of critics who argue that his theory is not indicative of the challenges faced by African American males.

Finally, the chapter proceeds to guide the reader in varied theoretical lenses that can be used to interpret the data, based on interpreting a particular student scene through the lenses of phenomenology, critical race theory, black feminism, and Freire's critical pedagogy. The culminating theory of Freire's critical pedagogy places a focus on dialogics and love as tie that links all of the presented theories.

By considering the context of the problems and the theoretical frameworks that culminate with Freire, the next chapter allows for the research methodology to merge the theories into study that moves participants to name the very factors that have oppressed them in the journey toward college success.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methodology used in this qualitative case study to explain the perceptions of six African American males in identifying persistence factors in college. A multi-campus, urban setting was used to answer the following research questions:

Main Research Question

1. What factors do African American males identify that help them persist in completing a community college education?

Sub-Questions

2. What do African American males say they have done for themselves to persist in the pursuit of higher education?

3. What do African American males find to be barriers to persistence in the pursuit of higher education?

4. What do African American males suggest that teachers do to help the African American males persist in the pursuit of higher education?

5. What do African American males suggest that institutions do to help African American males persist in the pursuit of higher education?

This chapter discusses the research techniques as well as the design implemented for the study. I start with the description of the epistemological framework of theory and philosophy used to guide the research and proceed to describe the research design approach and process for data collection and analysis. The methods and techniques for participant selection as well as the process for data collection are discussed in detail.

Special attention is given to the ethical issues and considerations involved in the research process. The strategies for achieving trustworthiness in this study are discussed at length. The section that follows is devoted to the explanation of the researcher's epistemological and methodological framework and how such beliefs informed and guided the given study.

The Framework

The epistemological framework of theory and philosophy used to guide the research (Creswell, 2003) for the dissertation is constructivism, using qualitative case study. Specifically, the constructed aspect of the study focuses on identifying the "subjective meanings of [the six African American males' lived] experiences … that are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow meanings into a few categories or ideas" (p. 8). Cresswell focuses on the interconnectedness of epistemology as it relates to the methodology and methods within a study, pointing out that the selected epistemology inform the research methodology and methods of data collection and analysis to be employed when conducting the research (p. 5-6).

One important component of the constructed experience of participants emerges from the constructed epistemological perspective. The actual interaction with others, with the organizational structure and norms and processes is a critical part of the social construction in that the perceptions are not in isolation, but within the social context of the organization in which the perceptions exist and interact. Adding to this social interaction is one other essential component, the researcher. The investigators must "recognize that their own background shapes the interpretation, and they "position

themselves' in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences" (p. 8-9). This epistemological viewpoint lends itself to "make sense of (or interpret) the meanings of others" (p. 9) by considering not only personal insights and experiences, participant experiences and statements, but also the multiple emerging patterns that emerge. The patterns surface across the varied participants articulated descriptions of their own experiences, and the investigator looks for ways of finding some defining categories that can capture a way of understanding and explaining the actual phenomena that the case study participants have experienced within the organization.

Another helpful way of viewing the framework for this study is by considering how the questions posed in the research represent "what is not known" (the 'gap' in the knowledge base) about the experiences of the participants (Merriam, 1998, p. 47). By focusing on what the participants experience, the lack of understanding of what factors are needed become more easily understood by identifying and explaining the emerging themes that the participants articulate, thus creating a defined case study within the organization.

The Case Study Defined

Although the posed questions literally ask, "What are the persistence factors?" the more specific, case study aspect of viewing the questions to the six participants is, "How are you persisting in college in spite of the challenges?" Or, another way of viewing the questions is, "Why are you persisting in college when you have so many challenges that make the attainment of a degree seemingly insurmountable?" This addressing of "how?" and "why?" questions positions the qualitative work as a case study

in a way that Yin (2003) describes as an explanatory study that can produce insights into participants' perceived experiences within the organization at the time of the study.

Further, the challenges with many case studies, as defined by Yin (2003), is that many research designs do not include five essential components: (1) study's questions, (2) propositions (if any), (3) unit(s) of analysis, (4) logic linking the research data to the propositions, and (5) criteria for interpreting the findings. When considering this qualitative study, the re-articulated "What?" questions position themselves as the explanatory, intrinsic "Why?" and "How?" questions that define the research, while the propositions are better understood as "what you are really interested in answering" (Yin, p. 22) through the epistemology of the study. Or another way of looking at the epistemological question is in considering the value of the identification and naming aspect that establishes the persistence factors that have been socially constructed by participants in their journey toward college success.

When this epistemological framework is layered over the research work, the critical pedagogy (Freire, 2002) approach requires that the investigator look for how the participants name the oppression, thus the naming process that is inherent in critical pedagogy serves as a primary proposition in the case study work. Additional aspects of critical pedagogy speak to the philosophical recognition that the participants need to have a conversation about their oppression (Freire, 2002) and this dialogue will serve as an emancipating part of the process.

The third essential component in defining the case study is in defining the unit(s) of analysis. Yin (2003) promotes tying the unit to the primary research question, indicating that this question establishes appropriate measures for a beginning and ending,

geography, included and excluded participants, along with a sense that discoveries along the way in the process of the research may warrant a shifting of how the unit is defined. For example, for this study of persistence factors of African American males, if a particular event or particular office had emerged as a common topic of discussion, the unit could be redefined to focus on how that event or office impacted persistence. However, because the primary research question remained with perception, the unit becomes the collective experiences of all of the participants in their overlapping, varied, and emerging themes.

The study uses a collective case study, as opposed to multiple case studies as an alternate possibility that Yin discusses. In comparing the possibilities of using multiple case studies, Yin encourages researchers to keep the door open to the possibility that allows each participant to be classified a separate case study with unique, emerging themes that can also be compared to the other participant cases to look for commonality and difference. Yin encourages investigators to be flexible when reading through the data to avoid forcing a single case study if reading for multiple case studies would reveal more nuances of commonality and difference when the cases are compared.

This multiple versus single case study remained open for me throughout the process until I was able to weed through the data and establish that a single case study was most appropriate for the six student participants for this study. An advantage of case studies is that such decisions about classifying a study as a single or multiple case studies can be delayed until the themes begin to emerge. Merriam (1998) points out that "the less control the investigator has over 'a contemporary set of events,' and/or if the variables are so embedded in the situation as to be impossible to identify ahead of time,

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case study has a distinct advantage" (p. 32). For this study of the six African American males, the open-ended interviews leave much room for unknown variables and experiences, thus lending itself to a delayed classification.

So the case study method of collecting their experiences within the confines of a nine-week span, with an initial 90-minute interview, the email exchanges, and the focus group member check of participants—in a session in which the tentative categorization of emerging themes was presented—became the defined unit of analysis for the study. This specific unit identification gave the research a "bounded" (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) timeframe and resource identification for data collection and subsequent member checking. Creswell's (2007) definition of case study places parameters of a bounded system, multiple sources of information, and a description:

> Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a *case*) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving ***multiple sources of information*** (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case ***description*** and case-based themes. (p. 73, emphasis in original)

With the single case study established, along with the multiple sources of an interview, email exchanges, and focus groups, the description is the final component suggested Creswell in order to fully create a bounded case study. The review of literature provides three aspects for establishing a bounded case: by time and space (Creswell, 2003), by time and activity (Stake, 1995), and by context and definition (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This research study was bounded by space with the multi-campus college setting over a nine-week time period for interviews, email exchange, and focus group, along with a specific context of the lived experiences as African American males that the students

encountered during the time they had attended the community college. With the case study bounded by time, space, activity, context, and definition, the next aspect of defining the case relates to the research data.

In the fourth essential characteristic for case studies, the need to link research data to propositions, Yin (2003) strongly promotes having a general analytic strategy prior to data collection that "depends on the investigator's own style of rigorous thinking, along with sufficient presentation of evidence and careful consideration of alternative interpretation" (p. 110). Yin argues for three general strategies, listed in preferred order: (1) relying on theories for propositions, (2) thinking about rival explanations to explain the data interpretations, and (3) developing a case description framework for organizing the study. This study does rely on a constructivist theoretical framework (Creswell, 2003) that promotes naming or defining of persistence factors—both the challenges and the resulting responses that help them to overcome the challenges—from a critical pedagogy stance (Freire, 2002). Although the first and preferred analytic strategy is the primary one used for this study, elements of the other two general strategies are included within the study as a way of balancing and supplementing the primary strategy. For example, the Data Analysis and Emergent Themes sections of the study will offer alternative interpretations of the study that can serve as both more complex interpretations and future research for the study. And the Data Analysis section of the study has provided an overall description for each participant, allowing the direct "emic" interview responses and the analyzed "etic" researcher descriptions (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995) to serve as descriptions to capture the individual and overlapping natures of each participant within the case study.

For the fifth essential component of designing a case study, criteria for interpreting the findings, is strongly connected to the fourth component in that the theories that link the data to the propositions often drives the type of analysis that is most efficient and meaningful. For example, in this study with the six African American males, the emerging themes start being analyzed once data is collected, based on observations, first impressions, information conversations after the interview that may clarify a comment made, or even encountered analogies that help to organize the "emic" data results (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) holds that "direct interpretation of individual instance and through aggregation of instances until something can be said about them as a class" are two strategic ways of analyzing cases.

Noting that these two strategies can inform the interpretation in equally substantial ways highlights the need for investigators to avoid a mere counting of the instances of a particular theme in identifying its relevance. The analysis stage requires that the researcher peruse the data for meaningful information that may occur once or repeatedly, both resulting in essential themes that help in explaining the significance of the case. Since this study uses qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 2004; Weber, 1990) as a method of organizing the data, the numeric representation of themes has the benefit of making evident emerging themes based on common, repeated references; however, the critical thinking of the researcher, the member check process, and the triangulation of additional researcher search for interpretations serve as mechanisms to avoid overlooking potential critical themes that the case presents.

Rationale for Methodology

When considering the constructed approach to interpreting the experiences within qualitative research, Cresswell (2003) poses this way of framing the researcher inquiry as merely one of four possible camps: constructivism, post positivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism (p. 6). With all approaches as alternative ways of approaching the inquiry, the investigator considers different methodologies and methods of making meaning of the participants' experiences based on the camp selected. Merriam (1998) points out a fine distinction for qualitative researchers: "Qualitative researchers *are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed …*" (p. 6). Additionally, Merriam (1998) points out that qualitative research "can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole" rather than doing what post positivist research would do in "tak[ing] apart a phenomenon to examine component parts … variables of the study." This difference in approach is what lends itself to using qualitative research in explaining the persistence factors of the six African American males so that the investigator can get a sense of the whole meaning within the context of the phenomenon rather than isolated meanings of the various influences that may contribute to the experiences of the participants but have no meaningful bearing on persistence from the viewpoint of the participants.

The qualitative case study approach lends itself to understanding a "particular case," one that Stake (1995) defines as an intrinsic case study that (in the case of this study) addresses a set of six African American male students who are positioned within the larger, multi-campus, urban community college and experience varied challenges that they must persist through in order to attain college success.

Qualitative Thematic Content Analysis

Further, to assist in the interpretive process, I used a research methodology of

qualitative Thematic Content Analysis (TCA), a descriptive presentation of qualitative

data in which the researcher classifies categories of text based on similar meanings

(Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 2004; Weber, 1990).   After transcribing the

interviews, I numbered each line of the interview transcripts and began the process of

searching for themes using a general analytic strategy (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995) of

identifying themes that emerged from theory available in literature review searches, along

with identifying the themes that the participants appeared to be more focused on

identifying as significant. I also used observations of past experiences of classroom

work, along with personal experiences as an African American male, to serve as potential

identifiers of significant themes.

Additionally, as Weber explains, as a case study in content analysis, the research

presented by categorizing the statements from participants "inferences about the sender(s)

of the message, the message itself, or the audience of the message (p. 98). White and

Marsh (2006) further explain that content analysis has a focus on creating a picture of a

phenomenon that maintains conceptual consistency:

> Qualitative content analysis focuses on creating a picture of a given phenomenon
>
> that is always embedded within a particular context, not on describing reality
>
> objectively … in qualitative [content analysis] research findings are confirmed by
>
> looking at the data, not the researcher(s) to determine if the data support the
>
> conclusions. The important criterion is not numeric correspondence between

coders but conceptual consistency between observation and conclusion. (p. 38-39)

White and Marsh further explain that the depicted relationships that emerge due to content analysis may be presented in multiple forms, such as numbers, percentages, tables, graphic models, narrative of findings, or quotations (p. 39). For this study, the actual count for each theme was placed in a table format and the emic data of interview quotations to support the categorization was placed in the table columns next to each code. The aggregate totals of each theme were presented in the table to identify the merging themes that resulted from the qualitative content analysis.

The important aspect of the content analysis is that the context of the big picture is clear from reviewing the data. As a result of the data being such a paramount factor in the content analysis, Ahuvia (2001) promotes including the original text, videos, or other texts in the actual report so that the data can be reviewed by readers of the research findings (White & Marsh, 2006, p. 40).

The focus of the qualitative content analysis lends itself to viewing the case study of the text as a type of phenomenology for the research will be on understanding the "essence," the "basic characteristics" of a scene or series of events to better understand experiences of individuals or groups, based on perspectives outlined by Nel Noddings (1998):

> We do not lay on our own structures, nor do we assimilate what the other says [or does] as a mere bit of information. We feel what the others is going through. Indeed, Simone Weil said that the implicit question we ask as we attend in this way is, "What are you going through?" … Second as we receive what is there in

the other, we feel our energy flowing toward the other's predicament or project.

We want to relieve a burden, activate a dream, share a joy, or clear up a

confusion. Temporarily, our own projects are put aside; we are caught up by an

internal "I must" that pushes us to respond to the other. (p. 67)

From this lens of examining "burdens," "dreams," "joys," and "confusions," the research

will involve exploring revealed meanings that emerge from interviews, email, and the

member-checking focus group session.

Rationale for Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The method applied to the case study research is open-ended interviews, a process

in which the researcher explores one or more individuals "in depth" by collecting detailed

evidence from a variety of sources over a "bounded" period of time or activities for the

purpose of making meaning (or sense) of experiences and individuals (Stake, 1995). The

advantage of case study interviews is that it allows the researcher to explore the depth of

an issue by focusing on how "inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful

attention to detail, context, and nuance" (Patton, 2002, p. 227), creating deeper, more

complex understanding of individuals or events within a specified time frame and

location. Additionally, according to Patton, case study data includes "interview data,

observations, the documentary data … impressions and statements of others about the

case, and contextual information …" (p. 449).

For the methodology of the research, the specific procedures for gathering,

analyzing, and writing data about the data include student interviews, student email

correspondence, observation of students, and self-reported data from college/institution.

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The format for interviews, observations, analysis, and writing up the data will be framed within the methods outlined by Moustakas (1994), Patton (2002), and Stake (1995).

Data Collection Methods

I used a one-on-one interview of one hour each, and one group interview of all student participants that lasted approximately ninety minutes (See Attachment 1).

The one-on-one interview consisted of meeting with each student in an agreed upon location, such as my office, to ask a list of prepared questions. The questions were revealed during the actual interview in order to receive the participant's initial, unplanned thoughts. Each interview followed the same format of questions. In the interviews, I asked questions within a semi-structured format (Patton, 2002, p. 342-349), combining informal and standardized open-ended questions in order to ask follow-up or clarifying questions when the participant presented ideas or situations that may have provided additional insight regarding research questions. Additionally, as Stake (1995) encourages, I kept "shorthand notes and count on member checks to get meanings straight" (p. 56). While the shorthand notes guided my immediate memory, I also used a digital recorder for each participant meeting, thus allowing me to review the words and intonation of participants, along with having a record of thought pauses or word corrections (Patton, 2002, p. 380-382).

Unlike grounded theory methods (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), Strauss and Corbin (1998) provide a model based on prior research of the literature in order to design initial interview questions to inform the topics of discussion to allow participants to discuss their perceptions of the experiences they have had in regard to their experiences as African American males in higher education.

In between the initial and second in-person interviews, I communicated with participants by email, asking for more information related to their experiences, including my asking for follow up and clarifying questions from the first interview (See Attachment 2). Many of the questions from the second interview were adapted from educational consultant and social analyst Jwanza Kunjufu's research (1988) related to African American students' struggle with peer pressure over being successful in school (p. 36-37). Although the in-person interviews provided more immediate, surface-level feedback, the expected results of written exchange had more of a tendency to be more thoughtful: "Writing forces the person into a reflective attitude—in contrast to face-to-face conversation in which people are much more immediately involved" (van Manen, 1990, p. 64).

This more reflective feedback provided more thoughtfully presented data that also served as a member checks (Stake, 1995) for emerging themes from the interviews, but the drawback, van Manen points out, is that people tend to write less due to their finding writing difficult, because they have more reservation when it comes to writing, or because they simply produce less text when they provide their own detailed accounts of their experiences: "This reflective attitude together with the linguistic demands of the writing process place certain constraints on the free obtaining of lived-experience descriptions" (p. 64). Although the writing component may have provided some challenges to the participants, my choosing the email exchange for their writing created a more informal communication method between the participants and me due to the email having a more conversational tone. I took care to avoid making the emails appear to be

assignments rather than mere conversations to understand something that was part of the "lived experience" of the participant.

After the one-hour interview and the email exchange for each participant, I provided the participants with typed manuscripts of their respective responses to the interview questions, and I requested that the participants correct or clarify any inaccurate or incomplete information from the transcripts. This was a member check item (Stake, 1995) intended to verify the accuracy of my typing and recording of data.

After I completed this individual member check, the group of participants were invited to review my current findings. In meeting with the participants, I used a focus group format (Krueger & Casey, 2009) to capture their comments in a systematic way that invited each person to comment on all of the themes, compare their thoughts with other participants, build on what other participants said, and prioritize and modify the themes I had already established. I provided a list of the themes that emerged from the study, along with emic data/quotes (Stake, 1995) that substantiated the established themes. Additionally, I provided the participants with a brief summary of my intended method of presentation of my findings. I asked the participants to respond to the presented themes to indicate if they agreed or disagreed with the emerging themes, along with asking them to further elaborate on their clarifying thoughts on the themes or quotes.

Data Analysis Methods

I analyzed interview data to search for emerging themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 2004; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995) to understand the issues regarding the lack of persistence for African American males in higher education. In the interviews, I asked questions (see Appendix B) using a semi-structured

format (Patton, 2002, p. 342-349), along with asking follow-up questions by email (see Appendix C) to clarify comments or themes that may have emerged from the planned in-person questions. I transcribed data from in-person and email one-on-one interviews, along with a final group interview with all participants. I then divided the data by numbering the lines of the transcriptions and cutting out the various phrases and sentences that appeared to represent possible themes or important points. I then began to categorize the themes (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995) and place them together by common subjects. To inform my sorting of text, I used the four lenses identified in Chapter Two: Phenomenology, Critical Race Theory, Black Feminism, and Freire's Critical Pedagogy.

Each interview was coded with a letter to identify specific themes, separately for each participant, then as a whole by looking at the themes without the separated codes by individual. Once the themes were established as a whole, I reprinted the aggregated form of the transcripts and resorted the codes to see if the emerging themes remained the same or needed to be resorted into different categories based on multiple readings. Additionally, after having reviewed the whole set of index cards, the codes were reprinted for each individual interview to see if an additional reading after having sorted based on the reading of the transcripts as a whole would reveal significant differences by individuals for different emerging themes or contradictions in interpretations of the coded themes.

To limit bias and improve clarity of the analysis process, the interview transcripts were peer reviewed by three doctorate degree researchers with a background in working with African American males. Two of the peer review researchers were African American males. One of the males teaches at an Historically Black College and works

with many African American males. The other male peer reviewer works at the same community college at which the interviewed participants attended. Additionally, this second male works with and researches African American male students at the college at which the research was conducted. The third peer reviewer was a white female who had completed doctoral work within the past year on the perceptions of experiences of African American males in high school. The peer reviewers were asked to establish their own set of emerging themes from the transcript data, and the resulting themes were compared afterward to the emergent themes I had established for this study to look for discrepancies, along with other emerging or alternate categories for the themes.

Selection of Participants

Participants in the study were African American males between 18-28 years of age who were enrolled at a community college. The college is a multi-campus, urban one located in the Midwest of the United States. I posted approved flyers around the college and community to recruit student participants (see Appendix E) who were good candidates for a research study on identifying persistence factors for African American males in completing a community college degree. Additionally, I sent letters (see Appendix G) to community leaders to request their support in identifying potential African American males for the study. This study used purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) to include participants who were African American male students across the college who could represent the unique experiences of African American males at the college as a single case:

Basis of Good Candidates

    (1) The student has either (a) been persisting in pursuit of degree or (b) the student

        has stopped persisting in pursuit of degree;

    (2) The student is willing to communicate by email;

    (3) The student is willing to participate in two in-person interviews.

From the generated list of recommendations, I searched for six African American male

participants, and I sent them initial emails to give them an overview of the study to

determine if they were still interested in participation (see Appendix F). From this set of

students, I gathered current information about their experiences that created persistence

factors for them.

Permissions Granted to Complete Study

        I received informed consent from students whom I interviewed (see Appendix D).

Additionally, I received informed consent from both the Research Department of the

community college from which the students come and the Institutional Review Board of

Oklahoma State University (See Appendix A).

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Trustworthiness

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        Trustworthiness is an alternative to the quantitative research concepts of

reliability and validity concepts that is put forward by qualitative researchers (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985). Several concepts relate to trustworthiness that researchers can include in a

study to ensure trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability.

Credibility

  According to Patton (2002), credibility refers to rigorous methods, credibility of the researcher, and philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry (p. 552-553). The data collection and analysis methods must be of high quality in order to address rigor. For this study, the semi-structured, tape-recorded interviews, along with triangulation through member checks, email exchanges, and focus groups, provide data collection rigor.

  Credibility of the researcher matters "because the researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry," (p. 566) necessitating an understanding of the researcher's experience, training, perspective, biases, personal connections, funding support—any "personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation" (p. 566). With this study, understanding that I am an African American male who has taken several research classes in qualitative research methods, along with practicum classes that have allowed for field research in interviewing and analyzing transcripts with seasoned full-time faculty researchers, helps build my experience level for expertise in qualitative research analysis. But it is also important to know that I have attended specialized training by the Research Inquiry Team of the National Writing Project, and that I serve as a co-facilitator of the Oklahoma State University Writing Project Teacher Inquiry Team, a group of teacher consults who provide research-based professional development to K-16 educators. These items help address my experience and training as a researcher for the study, while the other items related to credibility of the researcher are discussed within the other parts of the trustworthy section of the report.

Qualitative inquiry can be controversial for multiple reasons. Patton (2002) offers

reasons such as "qualitative versus quantitative methods, or science versus

phenomenology, or positivism versus constructivism, or realism versus interpretivism"

(p. 571). The essential consideration is that readers understand that qualitative research

has its detractors but also serves specific purposes that must be understood as the research

is being read. While quantitative inquiry tends to "convey a sense of precision and

accuracy even if the measurements that yielded the numbers are relatively unreliable,

invalid, and meaningless" (p. 573), qualitative inquiry often focuses on "study of issues

in depth and detail … without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis"

(p. 14). The purpose should drive the appropriateness of the research methodology, so

the purpose of this study lends itself to the qualitative research methodology due to a

need to identify the depth and detail of student perspectives on their lived experiences in

the community college that can unveil categories that promote student persistence or

hinder it.

Transferability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability refers to the "fittingness"

of using a "working hypothesis" that applies to one context or case with a "sufficiently"

congruent other context or case (p. 124). For this qualitative case study, the

particularized findings that represent the participants' lived experiences can be

transferred to other cases or contexts that "sufficiently" fit. This is an alternative to broad

generalizability that is often discussed in quantitative research, and it is often identified as

a type of naturalistic generalizability (Patton, 2002, p. 581-584).

Dependability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the issues of credibility and dependability are tied in that the researcher's use of "overlapping methods" that helps to achieve triangulation also allow other researchers to repeat the study and achieve similar findings. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba identify the detailed reporting of methodology and other aspects of the process used to complete a study as adding to the dependability of research. Miles and Huberman (1994) add that dependability refers to "whether the process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods." For this case study, this research has provided a detailed description of the data collection and analysis process in both the Research Methods and the Findings sections of the report.

Confirmability

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), confirmability, also referred to researcher objectivity, "can be framed as one of relative neutrality and reasonable freedom from unacknowledged researcher biases" (p. 278). This is also referred to as "external reliability." Suggested ways of addressing issues of confirmability include explicit descriptions of procedures so that the actual sequence can be followed of data collection, processing, and eventual interpretation, providing an "audit trail" (p. 278). Additionally, researchers should provide a statement about personal assumptions, values, and biases that may have influenced data analysis and interpretation. For this qualitative study, I have provided explicit descriptions of procedures, along with providing an explicit statement for researcher biases.

When considering the issues of trustworthiness, the researcher must maintain the

rigor of the study and demonstrate how findings were established for the readers,

providing a self-awareness that searches out and details possible researcher personal

circumstances or influences that may affect the data collection or analysis process. Refer

to Table 3.1 for an overview of what I applied to the inquiry process to maintain

trustworthiness.

Table 3.1 Researcher Actions to Ensure Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness Quality	Researcher Actions to Ensure Trustworthiness
Credibility	Adoption of well-recognized research methods, including triangulation, participant forms that allow them to not answer questions or remove themselves from the study, peer scrutiny, description of background of the researcher, member checks, etc.
Transferability	Detailed description of phenomenon in question to allow for comparison; background data to allow context
Dependability	Using "overlapping methods"; in-depth methodological description to allow study to be repeated
Confirmability	Triangulation to reduce effect of investigator bias; admission of researcher's beliefs and assumptions; listing of limitations and delimitations; in-depth methodological description to allow integrity of research results to be scrutinized

Ethical Issues

My primary ethical issues relate to maintaining the privacy of those whom I interview and the integrity of representation. I need to be sure that I present my findings based on what the participants actually say rather than what I believe the reasons to be because of my personal experiences or from my research of the literature.

Researcher Biases

As an African American male professor, my two biases relate to (1) my being both African American and a male who has completed a community college degree, a goal that my research participants are struggling to achieve, along with (2) my being an instructor who teaches several African American students at a community college. Being an African American male presents common experiences and culture that ties me to the research participants. With such a potentially close relationship, my role is to make sure that I do not superimpose my feelings and opinions on the words and observations I have for the research participants. Additionally, as an African American male with a graduate degree, the potential bias related to having attained the goal of a community college education could emerge.

Techniques and goals that worked for me may not be relevant to the case study population. I will address this area of bias by providing descriptive observational details that avoid interpretive notations that have judgments related to my values and strategy usage. I will also record direct quotes as much as possible, along with summarizing content as close to the original wording as possible. By providing the rich description and direct quotations, I will provide sufficient information so that the "data [can stand] independently so that another trained researcher could analyze the same data in the same

way and come to essentially the same conclusion … [producing] a plausible and coherent explanation of the phenomenon under scrutiny" (Mays & Pope, 1995). By following these types of direct quotes and descriptive presentation, I believe my potential for imposing my values on the interpretation becomes less likely and the rigor of the study is protected.

Another area of researcher bias relates to having a position as a professor in a community college, a place where I encounter African American male students often in the classroom setting. My concern is that I may have made some assumptions from observing the behaviors of many of my students that could slant my opinion of why they are not succeeding in classes. For example, I have seen many African American students not submitting assignments, not attending classes, not contributing to discussions, not communicating with me through email or phone messages, or not visiting with me during office hours. As an instructor, I know that these are factors that could positively influence retention and success for students, but I am not witnessing significant usage of these practices among the students I have encountered.

Although my observations have relevance, my focus in avoiding bias is to not allow my classroom observations to overshadow the perceptions that the students present in their statements and observations during the research interviews. Continued attention to detailed observation and realistic awareness of the potential for bias will equip me as a researcher to focus on avoiding bias, but it also helps the reader be aware that this bias is a probable reality and is a tension that exists within the text (Hood, 2006, p. 219). Additionally, my focus on analyzing the data for themes that emerged from the data analysis was among the most critical aspects of avoiding this area of researcher bias.

Materials

The primary tools for the research study are the oral Interview Questionnaires. The questions stem from the themes that have emerged from a literature review of factors that affect African American male success within a college setting. The first interview set of questions cover a range of background information about early educational experiences to current community college experiences. Additionally, the questions offer opportunities for the participants to discuss best, worst, encouraging, and discouraging experiences related to attaining an education, along with allowing participants to offer advice for teachers of African American male students. The subsequent interview questions were follow-up questions that related discrepancies among and within interviews of the participants.

Additionally, I used a digital audio recorder that allowed me to pause / mark specific time points of recordings, slow playback, and rewind repeatedly for the purposes of transcribing interviews. I used a tape recorder for the initial and follow up interviews.

Email is another tool for the research. I used email for follow-up questions to clarify emerging themes and to capture additional commentary from participants in an attempt to give them a chance to articulate their thoughts in a more thoughtful, written manner. The email format also provides an opportunity for triangulation of research from an original-source document.

Again, I used a digital audio recorder for the final group meeting with the participants. This interview included a review of the themes that emerged from the data. The purpose of the group interview is to capture the collective reactions of the participants to the recurring, emerging themes, along with discussion of their perceived

validity. The other complementary purpose of the group interview was to query the participants for additional responses over what barriers exist for successful completion of a community college degree for African American males.

Summary

This chapter outlines the research methodology used in this qualitative case study to explain the perceptions of six African American males in identifying persistence factors in college. This chapter began with a description of the epistemological framework of theory and philosophy used to guide the research, along with defining how the Yin's five essential components of case study research design are represented within this study.

The study proceeded by describing the research design approach, along with identifying the qualitative content analysis and process for data collection and analysis. The methods and techniques for participant selection, data sorting, as well as the process for data collection are discussed in detail. Special attention is given to the ethical issues and researcher bias considerations involved in the research process. The strategies for achieving trustworthiness in this study are discussed at length, along with the materials used in the study.

By considering the context of the study, the review of literature, and the research methods used in data collection and analysis, the next chapter presents the findings of the study along with a brief description of the participants and some of their direct quotations that paint a picture of each interviewed person.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS AND EMERGENT THEMES

This chapter serves two primary purposes. The first purpose is to provide a description of each of the African American male student participants for the study. The student participants were given pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity within the case study. Essential to the case study are the selected data that the researcher selects as a written account of the phenomenon of the study to represent the case study participants. The selected data are intended to give the reader rich descriptions through quotations and thick descriptions that give a sense of presence with the encounters of the person being described (Merriam, 1998).

The second purpose of the chapter is to discuss the significant themes that emerged from the data analysis. The themes were designated based on systematic sorting using the lenses identified in Chapter Two: Phenomenology, Critical Race Theory, Black Feminism, and Freire's Critical Pedagogy. As a result of interviews, email correspondence, and focus group discussions with six interview respondents, 372 individual items facing African American males were identified. After the broad themes are identified, the chapter will follow with a description of the context of the case site and then thick descriptions of the study participants for the case study site.

Of these, 139 items were related to a broad theme of **Institutional Factors**, 90 items were specifically related to a broad theme of **Family and Community Membership**, 75 items were related to a broad theme of **Personal Values and Goals**, and 68 items were related to a broad theme of **Managing College and Life**. The items were categorized by broad type and then smaller subtypes to establish general themes.

Then the 372 identified items were sorted by persistence type to identify the frequency of items that promote and develop persistence for African American male college success versus factor items that require persistence from African American males to overcome barriers for college success.

Site Description

The community college for this research is a multi-campus institution that is located in an urban setting and serves more than 20,000 adult students annually— unduplicated enrollments. The college has a four-decade reputation of high teaching standards, excellence for transfer and workforce development programs, along with a long history of strong community support. The multi-campus system serves each major sector of the city (having north, south, east, and west campuses), but students tend to take classes at all of the campuses over a given semester, thus making the college efforts to design scheduling, curriculum, and enrollment processes with a single-college concept for course offerings and student support. Classes are offered all year, with multiple terms running concurrently in a given semester. As for the student ethnic composition, 63% are White/Caucasian, 10% are Black/African American, 3% are Asian, 9% are Native American, and 5% are Hispanic. The students in the college represent a diverse group of students that reflect the composition of the city.

For the African American student population (counting only first-time freshmen), the retention numbers (see Appendix H) for this population is 60% compared to 74% overall college rates for the first semester, 36% compared to 50% overall college rates for the first year, and 16% compared to 36% overall college completion rates over a three year period.

When considering developmental courses for the African American student population (counting only first-time freshmen), the percentage of students who tested into developmental math (see Appendix H) was 77% compared to 65% overall college placement in developmental mathematics; for developmental reading the percentage was 57% compared to 39% overall college placement in developmental reading; and , for developmental writing the percentage was 44% compared to 17% overall college placement in developmental writing.

Descriptive Portrait of Participants

Participant #1 Jerome

I had known Jerome for several months. The turning point of our meetings seemed to have been when we met in a hallway, and I asked him how school was. It seems that I always had asked him about school, but this time he seemed to express some doubts about whether he would make it. He shook his head from left to right, hanging his head somewhat, with a tone of voice that suggested a person who was losing hope, a voice filled with phrases that caught my attention: "I don't know about this," "I'm trying, but it's really hard to make it," and "I have to do it [work]." Our discussion revealed that he was struggling, not only with being present for school, but with finances, with study time, and with support.

Jerome had missed a few classes, but most of his absences were due to work schedule conflicts, something he could not avoid if he wanted to pay for his car, his rent, and his food. His story, so similar to many of the community college students, became more complex due to his being an African American male. Why? Because, he had the

social stigmas to overcome of being an African American male—some of learning

potential, some of gang affiliation, some of peer support, some of family support.

The first time I met Jerome, he sat outside of the lab, waiting for assistance from one of

the lab tutors. An African American male, dressed in heavily starched jeans, name brand

shoes and shirt, and the all-too-typical gang-style red hats. His attire sends many African

American mothers into a frenzy as they try to preach to their children that these images

are counterproductive in a society that will already have ill-informed preconceptions of

African American males—but his story gave me moment for pause. In my first

encounter with 24-year-old Jerome, I met him in the reading lab; he held his head toward

the floor, not seeming to have much inclination to look at anyone (specifically me) in the

eye. He was there for tutoring—definitely a good thing. I was glad he had managed to

connect with one of the lab paraprofessionals.

"How are you doing Jerome?" I asked.

"I'm fine Mr. Dickens … just here to get some help."

"That's great. This is definitely the place to get help. I'm sure they will guide you in the

right direction." Be sure to let me know if I can help with anything."

"Ok. I will."

Jerome smiled somewhat shyly, somewhat raising his head as we finished our

conversation. I think he felt a moment of connection. He did not seem to be so alone

after we had spoken. With the usual questions I asked of students when I catch a shared

moment of conversation, I asked if he had considered becoming involved with our

African American Student Association. He said he had considered it but had not been

able to make a meeting due to work and his school schedule. I encouraged him to attend

and told him when the group met. He seemed interested in getting together with other students like himself and more African American mentors who worked at the college, yet I did not see him at any of the meetings that semester—although he would stop by my office periodically to say hello.

The next encounter with Jerome that stood out to me was at a barbershop, sometime around Christmas. He walked in the door, his hair grown out from what appeared to be a few months of non-cutting, and he now had a morning shadow that appeared to have carried over from a few days of non-shaving. Of course, he was surprised to see me, and was his always-polite self. Since I had seen him several times before this one and knew that he was typically well groomed, I wondered how he felt about my seeing him in this not-so-well-groomed state. The barber cut his hair while I was there waiting for my barber to get to me. After his cut and shave, I recall a comment from one of the female barbers: "He looks as different as night and day!" And he did, I thought, without commenting to the other barber regarding my agreement. The well-groomed, eager student I had met several months before emerged from the chair that had originally been occupied by a young man who had lost time with his appearance, one who appeared to have lost a public connection with general grooming. What was going on with him I wondered.

At that moment, I decided I would take special effort to make a difference for him, whether it be as a mentor, advisor, teacher, or big brother figure. When I considered Jerome's past interaction with faculty, he described his memories as follows:

Sometimes I would interact with [instructors] whenever class was over. Basically, I try to talk with them one on one, as far as dealing with assignments and what I

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needed to study and stuff like that. I had built a relationship [with the instructors] because they would see me after class studying or working on homework. If I had questions and I would see them around, I would ask them [for help]. That wasn't always frequently. It wasn't always the case sometimes because some of the teachers didn't have offices and stuff on the campus. Or I couldn't get in touch with them at a certain time, or if I was dealing with a problem or something they could probably tell me to do it over the phone, but sometimes I really couldn't comprehend [when meetings were not in person] because I'm like a visual person in terms of hands on and seeing it done at the same time.

Jerome also has a background from high school in that he was close to his auto body teacher. This close relationship with his teacher helped him a great deal in continuing through school as a form of encouragement. For Jerome, the faculty and staff connection was essential in his encouragement as a student.

Important to understanding Jerome's background is knowing that he started at the lowest levels of reading, writing, and mathematics for developmental education at the school. Although he was slowly moving up the ladder of developmental education, his path has been taking him several years—more than five—as he had worked toward earning a computer science degree while still completing the developmental coursework that must be completed in order for him to move on to college-level work each semester. And even with his 48 hours of attempted course work, only 18 of those hours were for successfully completed college-level classes that can count toward his degree. For Jerome, making it through developmental education toward college-level course work

has been a significant obstacle that represents his struggle to community college

persistence, one that he still desires,

Even after more than five years pursuing the degree, Jerome notes that he has had

to sit out a semester due to having to pay for his education, due to transportation

challenges, or simply having to deal with the varied personal issues that surface due to

family emergencies or need to address issues that would distract him from studying

during a semester. He classifies his time of not going to school as "pause time" while he

continues to figure out how to complete his degree.

Participant #2 Gordon

Gordon, a 20-year-old African American male student, has almost completed his

degree at the college and has chosen an economics degree. As a high school student he

was also part of advanced placement classes. His degree and educational background

distinguishes him from most students in that he has a strong background in math and

science, unlike the stereotypes that tend to be associated with most African American

males. However, in spite of Gordon's strong educational background, he notes that he

does still have a number of obstacles that he faces in his experiences at the college:

1. Being one of few blacks in classrooms (especially non-developmental ones);

2. Not having enough culture and out-of-classroom events aimed at African
   Americans; and

3. Having to work more hours than other students based on his family
   circumstances.

When considering his discussion of his classroom experiences, Gordon described how his

high school and college time has included several experiences in which he felt criticized

when he was in a classroom and doing well as a black male. The criticism would come

from peers and sometimes as an unexpected surprise from his teachers when they realized

that he studied or read certain books. When his peers observed his study focus, Gordon

had a similar sense of conflict of being popular with peers or being smart (Kunjufu,

1988). He described how his peers often called him names that seemed to suggest he was

not true to the black heritage he held as important: "Sometimes people would say stuff

like, 'You're white,' or just by the way you study, the way you talk, or the way you

present yourself, or the way you care so much about school and being involved in clubs,

they just criticized all of that."

Gordon's story points to how some peers actually discourage successful

persistence habits, so his priority had to be to persist in spite of some of the negative

comments he had been receiving from peers. Additionally, he noted that sometimes in

his classes with other black males, he had to deal with being compared to other black

males who may not have chosen to study as hard as he was to achieve success. For

Gordon, his response appeared to be more of a counter narrative response (Doeke,

Homer, & Nixon, 2003; Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, & Peters, 1996; Harper, 2009) that

emerges from critical race theory as one's actions are often perceived to be by self or

others as a contrast or argument against the main stream or accepted reality that has been

accepted within society—in this case the educational classroom as society.

Adding to the counter-narrative aspect of Gordon's life, his story seems to point

to how this discouragement from peers becomes one factor that contrasts those who

simply disregarded his success based on his color and gender alone. Gordon pointed out

that both faculty and teachers sometimes find his variance from the stereotypes shocking

to them. His response to this is a sense of responsibility to be a good model for his race, countering the negative stereotypes that many may have of those of his race and gender: [At times,] I'm the only black guy in some classes; there is only one or two of us and, so with the few that they see or that they have, I want to be able to be an example, to be a good example, and show that I do care, just to set an example for us as a whole." He further describes how his experiences in small groups often create a potential distraction for his persistence:

> Sometimes it would seem like people are just afraid to ask me a questions or when we would break up into small groups they'll be like wondering, "Should I work with him?" or just seem like they are kind of fumbled on their take on me, and so that can also be a distraction. But a lot of times I just try to ignore this because I don't want that to distract me or have me get mad or angry with them. I would rather just let it be and push past that and go about myself.

Gordon's sense of responsibility as an African American male definitely pushes him to persist so that he becomes a role model for others of his race and for those who observe his race.

Gordon noted that his middle school years of schooling were most influential to him in a positive way because he felt particularly close to his instructors. At this time in his life, he was going through the death of his father and the middle school teachers took the time to talk with him and get to know him as an individual, creating a relationship based on respect and trust. In noting his performance in classes with these teachers with whom he had had established fondness, Gordon noted, "I actually think I did a lot better in those classes because I wanted to make them proud as well as myself proud.

So middle school, definitely, I think was more influential. They also helped me in terms of giving me advice for the future, for high school, and life in general." Gordon's experiences definitely highlight the significance of having teachers who connect on an individual basis. In an additional, related topic that Gordon commented on related to positive role models, he noted that he had several interactions with other African American males at the college who encouraged him and gave him advice. Gordon also pointed out that the males served as mentors who helped him be aware that there were not enough African American doctors or people in corporate America, so he should be one of them.

Gordon also made note that he had a great desire to see more specific activities that helped students connect with their cultural roots, along with bringing in prominent black males, and have events and volunteering in the communities that represented more African American people. His focus on these activities pointed to several Afrocentric practices that educators promote as a way of creating a sense of pride in and awareness of the historical significance of American Americans (Asante, 2002). The speakers also add to this development of pride in culture. The desire to have events in communities of African Americans and to volunteer speak to two items that Gordon identifies as important to him: sharing what he has learned with his community so that those who are younger than he can see possibilities outside of their communities, along with his giving back to the community from which he comes.

One aspect of Gordon's life that he noted as being more significant for himself that created a major challenge for him as a student was that of his need to work more than other students to whom he compared himself. While other students socialized, partied, or

had hours and days of downtime, Gordon spent much of his time working to pay for his car, clothes, books, and other essentials needed for him to be in school. Although he noted that his family was supportive and had degrees, he also pointed out that he had to figure out how to pay for his education, a reality that he felt was definitely applicable to African American males, both personally by being a male but also culturally as an expectation for African American males.

Participant #3 Trey

Trey, a 27-year-old college student with a seven-year-old boy, a divorcee, working a full-time job, and is the head of a single-parent household. He definitely does not fit the typical African American male stereotypes that are often reported in the media outlets or discussed by those in social gatherings. He promotes strong responsibility for black men and has a strong sense of duty that he insists is needed among black men and by others who should encourage this strong sense of responsibility:

> You could be a father on the weekend and someone's going to tell you that you're doing great, because your cousin down the street is ignoring his kids. Well guess what? It's supposed to be more than that. You're supposed to be more of a father. What your cousin is doing is unthinkable and that's the attitude we should have. If you're a man, the bare minimum is being part of your child's life every day.

Trey notes how his struggle with school often is how to do what is best for his son. He wants an education so that he can offer his son a better life, but he also wants to be a responsible father who nurtures his son during this very critical time to be a well-nurtured, educated, balanced boy. He does not spend his time complaining about being

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the primary care giver; instead, he is grateful that he has had the opportunity to be a good father to his son.

His story for making it to college is interesting in that he took his GED test to go around finishing up his high school last two years. He had been taking care of himself since he was 14 years old, and a high school counselor pulled him to the side because he was failing one required class due to not showing up to it—an early morning class—and the result was that he was failing the course, not due to inability to do the work but because poor attendance meant point deductions. The counselor encouraged Trey to take the GED because she saw in him the ability to comprehend well and that part of his education was not being challenged in his high school setting, and this path was certainly not going to lead him to pursue higher education. Trey reported, "I left school and started working more full time and responsibilities of having a family came about and I started to continue on and that's how I ended up taking the GED test." Interestingly, rather than taking the GED test when he was at the high school age, Trey started working and focused on his family and making a living. It was at a later stage of his life, when he was 22 years old, that he finally decided to take his GED test.

When he finally took the GED test, Trey counted the actual testing as one of his fondest memories in education. With his having been out of school for several years and not as confident with his academic preparation for the test, he had anticipated that he would have to retake the GED test several times before passing it. To his dismay, not only did he pass it the first time, but he also scored the highest on the science part of the exam than anyone in the past. This defining moment in his life set Trey up for a memory

that led him to a level of confidence that prepared him for persistence against the many odds he has faced as a single-parent father who works full-time as he raises his children:

> I went that morning, and they announced all the people who passed the GED test, and I didn't expect to pass the first go round, although I did. I was still kind of nervous about it. They called off my name and also mentioned that I had made one of the highest scores that they have ever had in the sciences. When you make a list of goals in life, to have something accomplished and something of that magnitude, I never doubted once in my life that I could make it. I knew I could always hustle myself through life, but when I accomplished that goal [with the GED] that related to academics, it put something in the back of my head: that now I can go on to college and go on to do other things.
>
> That exact same day I went and I came here to ICC and enrolled. Although classes were about to start in a few days and everything, I didn't care. I was so excited and anxious about the reality that I really could accomplish anything that I put my mind to it… and I knew it.

Trey's score on the GED test was his motivating moment in life: "It was the first time I realized it; there was nothing that I could not do. That was the greatest moment of my life."

When Trey described his interactions with instructors for both high school and college, he shared a common theme of connecting with teachers. He called it a social connection: "As a child and even as an adult I feel like, because of my maturity level, I've always been able to talk to them about social issues and different things of that nature." Trey's ability to connect around social issues allowed him a doorway into a

connection with faculty that motivated him to feel part of the academic experience. The problem, as Trey points out, is that his academics sometimes did not match his social connection: "I always felt like I had a distance between myself and the teachers as far as the work was concerned as hard as it might seem." This unfortunate line between academics and social connection certainly highlights a struggle that Trey has that matches many African American males. When issues regarding the social arena are part of the topic (e.g., talking about politics, photography as a hobby, or liking clothes that he wore), Trey and the instructors align well and Trey is inspired. However, when the academic conversation begins, some of the protocols that surface in academia force a sense of isolation or separation for Trey and his connection with faculty.

Attendance policies or expectations for his academic work were not always clear points of connection. Trey felt that a few of his teachers were "more surprised and intrigued" that he did not fit the stereotypes that they had thought of for his being an African American male. Trey's perception was that "no matter what I said, they were just always amazed, and it probably wasn't any much different from what the person next to me said, but there was the feeling that they were feeling that way specifically because of my race." For Trey, this was a type of "Amazed Gaze" that incorrectly made significance of his insights because the teachers for some reason did not think that his race and gender status were reflective of such thinking. Trey noted that this type of "Amazed Gaze" thinking emerged from instructors he had encountered starting with elementary school and proceeding to his experiences in college. This type of thinking certain represented a clear persistence barrier for Trey.

Trey also further articulated his definition of how to prioritize academic and social needs in his life, noting that his decision to pause in his educational work had to do with needing to prioritize his family at a time when they needed him most. His being the father of a seven-year-old child set his priority:

I guess I am a successful student; however, I've had to drop classes, but I feel like I've been prepared academically. I do feel like as for the social part that took place as far as my son, the divorce, I wasn't prepared to continue on academically with large personal things on me. I'm yet to be able to master meshing the both … I have taken academics from the top and that's because for the point my life is at now. I wouldn't suggest to an 18 year old to take academics from off the top before someone such as myself, a 27 year old with a 7 year old who needs something, that's top. But if I'm an 18 year old with no responsibilities, this [attaining a degree] is my responsibility. So, once I have responsibilities, I won't have to make those types of decision [to put family, work, and other responsibilities that come with getting older.]

Trey's definition of success takes into account that his dropping of classes and having to place his family as a higher priority has become a reality that he must contend with that has defined him as a student. Even with this complex set of priorities, Trey remained committed to completing his degree.

Participant #4 Lucas

Lucas, an 18-year-old college student, lived at home with his parents, took high school advanced placement courses, and was finishing up 14 college-level hours during this first semester. Lucas, a music major, had favorable memories of marching badly

during his high school years: "I would have to say marching band [was one of my best memories of school since] music is the thing that I'm really good at besides math, but music is one of my main sharp points." Lucas' fondness for music runs deeply enough so that he has decided that his goal is to earn a doctorate degree in music.

One of the defining points in Lucas' educational experiences is how the recalls his most teacher influences, ranging from elementary to high school. Lucas noted that his teachers often had a firm hand on him throughout his academic experiences to make sure he stayed on track:

> They were always strict and made sure that I did my work. I had sloppy handwriting. They made me do it over again. Middle school – it was mostly my math teachers that wanted to help me get through school. My football coach as well, in high school, my band director… my choir teacher.

This type of support helped him make it through his classes but certainly created a shocking shift between high school and college. Lucas noted that there was a lot more homework in college that required that he manage his time differently. He also recognized that his high school teachers tended to go through full class periods explain concepts, while college instructors often just go through the material briefly and they are done with the coverage, a definite shifting of responsibility that he had encountered in the transition to the college setting. One interesting recommendation that Lucas made for other African American males in college is that they need to turn in their work on time, a practice that he still needed to become better at practicing.

Trey also gave specific advice that African American males turn in all work on time. His awareness of this challenge seems to have been quite personal because he

noted that several of his high school teachers had to help him overcome this same problem when he was transitioning from middle to high school:

> That year was a bad year for me, because of the transition from middle school to high school. I was having problems trying to keep my grades up the first semester, and then I had a talk with some of my teachers, and they told me to just work harder because they saw me working. If I didn't get finished with my work, I wouldn't turn it in. [The teachers] saw me doing my work, but [noticed I did] not turn it in. So they said I should just turn in what I had [completed] and get credit for that.

Lucas' teachers persuaded him of the value of turning in partial work for partial credit, contrasting the often-erroneous presumption that students take when they will not turn in anything if they are approaching a deadline and have only completed a portion of the work.

In regard to school connections, Lucas' personality dictates how he connects with the school and his peers: "I make a lot of friends. I get to know everybody. I won't just stick out somewhere I make friends with everybody and talk to teachers." During the interview, Lucas pointed out that he has a significant social network that spans from middle school to college, along with a large family support system. Many from his social network join him in the things he participates in within the college. For Lucas, this gives him a strong support system that he acknowledges as being a significant resource for him: "I know that I have people to help me and support me through college and be there if I ever have problems while I'm in college. I know I have people there to go and to talk to."

In regard to stereotypes, Lucas noted that he does have to deal with the stereotypes that others have of him from both the peer and instructor level. From peers and teachers, he noted that some comments are made, "I don't act like the others … [as in] walking around with sagging pants, acting crazy and being loud, and I don't act like that." With this reflection, Lucas maintained that these stereotypes do not make him feel uncomfortable because he chooses not to worry about such thoughts: "I just ignore it."

Of the six interviews, Lucas' was the most brief, reflecting perhaps his lack of experience and reflection about the community college experience; he was also the youngest and seemed to struggle the most with overall focus on his classwork. He mentioned during his suggestions for other African American males that teachers should spend more time making sure students are not having trouble understanding the work or with school in general. Lucas also noted that parents could help the African American males by "staying on them all the time," along with "making sure [the African American male students] are doing their work." Based on other comments Lucas made about his experiences with significant teachers from his past, this role of being a constant monitor of the work being done on time and consistently has been a key factor to his persistence and what he suggests for other African American males.

Participant #5 Fred

Fred, a 22-year-old computer science major, is the sole male of his father's children. Also, Fred has uncles who have no children, leaving Fred with a sense of responsibility to attain success but also pass along the family name: "So they want me to be able to pass on the family name and get a college education. They're like, 'After this you're the only person, so you got to do good. You have to go to college and you have

to…" This added pressure to succeed, not only in college but also with a family, adds to Fred's overall desire for persistence.

When Fred describes his past educational experiences that led up to his college days, he admitted that his high school days were not helpful to his college work. His high school experiences proved to be mostly negative in his mind. He recalled that the preparation focused mainly on taking the standardized tests that measure overall grade levels or prepare students for college. His general sentiment was that high school was a place of "information [that] was already too late" in terms of classes to take and deadlines to meet or the preparation required to meet the requirements for his goals in life. He mentioned that he had been told in high school that math was important to his computer science degree plans for college, but he never had a recognition that he needed to have enrolled in many upper level math courses in order to finalize his degree:

> I was always told how important math was in my degree area but I didn't know to what extent. I didn't know that I would have to take up to Calculus III for my Associate Degree. I wasn't expecting that. They just said it was really important; I just thought they meant a little later down the line.

This disconnected communication between the high school faculty and advisors with Fred seems to have marked his perceptions of the factors that forced him into taking more remedial classes than he should have needed. He noted that he would have made different choices in selecting his math courses had he known the courses that he needed to take: "I would have pushed for a better math education and tried to take some of the advanced placement courses. I didn't take any AP classes and when I had a chance, I dropped it because I was going to Vo Tech instead."

Further to his experiences in math, Fred noted that his high school teachers often did not have textbooks to give students due to the schools not purchasing new ones or the old ones were too outdated.   His experiences also included classroom interactions in which students created such chaos that teachers simply could not teach:

Then there was one occasion, my algebra teacher, just didn't teach algebra. She would teach whatever was on her mind at the time, even about the cabin she and her husband bought in Wyoming. She lost the homework twice. We fell behind the other algebra classes. I failed the first quarter [because] of it. And I was placed in remedial [courses] and therefore had to take algebra twice. I got an algebra book and learned it by myself. Pretty much, I stayed at the back of the room that whole semester, away from the rest of the class doing algebra problems [with the teacher who did not teach the subject], and the next year I had to redo algebra because they weren't really counting it as algebra [due to the complaints about what had happened]. I [had] told my mom, but she didn't believe me until other students started filing complaints ...but [the teacher is] still working there.

Of course, Fred's experiences with poor advise, poor educational experiences, and lack of textbooks is not a rare situation for many of the schools for African American male students that continues to create an achievement gap among African American males (Kunjufu, 1988; Ladson-Billing, 2006; Noguera, 2008). His ongoing struggle in college reflects the outcomes of these practices that follow students for a lifetime.

In regard to Fred's Vo Tech experiences, he noted that this is the most significant preparation he had for college readiness. He voiced that the Vo Tech program prepared him by helping him explore the field of computer science so that he had a better

understanding of the jobs that related to computer science and had more confidence that this was a field that would allow him to enjoy his job and not switch majors, as he noted several students tend to do when they are going through their college course work:

I noticed that a lot of people were going into a computer science degree, which I'm doing, not knowing anything about it, not knowing what to expect and they would eventually end up switching their degrees, or just having a really hard time. Because I went to Vo Tech, I already knew what the degree was going to be about and what I needed to do.

Although Fred's high school experiences included several obstacles related to preparation, he has managed to survive his college struggle by depending on much of the training provided to him through the Vo Tech experience. A major benefit for Fred has been that he has been able to work while in college in computer labs, writing programs using his understanding of computer language, and doing personal computer repairs—all a result of his experiences with the Vo Tech program.

Another significant aspect of Fred's college experience has been his financial struggles. Although Fred has a brother with a bachelor's degree, an uncle with a master's degree, and another uncle with a doctorate degree, he experienced the challenges of finances because his financial dependence is tied to his mother. He lives with her, and they receive subsidized housing assistance. In one of his semesters, Fred noted that he failed several of his classes his first semester of college because of his family losing a house:

My first semester [in college], our landlord sold the house that we were living in. So the new landlord, his son, wanted to live in the house. Whenever housing was

trying to pay rent, [the son] wouldn't accept it so housing said that since he

wouldn't accept it he could evict us. And if he did [evict us], they would just toss

out or housing for three years. And my mother and I can't really afford to not

have housing since we don't have an income to be able to rent a house solely on

our own, so we couldn't take legal action at all. Housing wasn't going to back us

on it and so we had to move. I ended up living with my grandmother for a while.

During that move it was in midterms, so I missed all my midterms and I ended up

like failing some courses and I [would] lose financial aid because of that or be put

on probation because of it.

The sense of frustration from Fred in dealing with a financial situation was compounded

by his concern that confusion from staff members in helping him with financial aid

processing also worked against him. He noted that sometimes the college staff did not

tell him that additional paperwork needed to be submitted, even when he asked if more

information was needed:

I'll turn stuff in and I'll ask, "Is this all I need?" and then I'll show up a week later

like to financial aid, and they'll say there's more stuff I need … There's no

communication or anything. I'll sit there and I'll ask, "Is this everything I need?"

And they'll just say, "Yes that's it." And I'll show up and there's something else

that they need and that's has been very [consistent]; it's happened every year.

There hasn't been a smooth year for me. I guess I have to just make sure that I

know the system already and turn in everything, because otherwise they're not

there to help you.

The unfortunate part of Fred's experience is that he captures a common challenge that students face in navigating the college process for financial aid, enrollment, or any multi-step system that requires multiple people and is critical for the ongoing success of students as they attempt to persist in colleges. And because Fred's and many other African American males situations often involve multiple challenges, such as financial aid, academic probation, remedial course completion, and transportation constraints, the path to persistence is much more difficult for this population because the hurdles to overcome are so numerous.

Stereotyping is another significant obstacle that Fred encounters in his college experience. Fred described how he felt that he, along with other black males, were placed into predetermined groupings that created a tendency for people to want to ask him or determine for him, ""What kind of black male are you?" And with this grouping, Fred found that he struggled when others discovered or he could not make himself fit into any of the preconceived groupings:

> They put you into these groups, "So what kind of black male are you?" There's also another side where if I don't fit into the stereotypes for black people, they say you're not black, and when asked or confronted they can never say what they think a black person should act like or be. They get very uncomfortable. They can't answer it. Like what trait do I have that doesn't associate with black people? And that's something that I've never had with other black people but [I have experienced this grouping challenge] specifically with white people, not any minority group or other black people. There is probably about eight times where that has happened.

In responding to these challenges, Fred claims that these stereotypes do not affect his academic performance. Even though he claims that he does not allow these patterns of grouping to affect him, the comparison seems similar to the heavy load described by Langston Hughes in his "Dream Deferred" poem. He also describes what Sue (2010) defines as racial microaggressions that tend to cause emotional, psychological, and physical stresses over time due to the subtle, systematic, and socially acceptable patterns that make people from a marginalized group question their worth or their habits or traditions.

Participant #6 Craig

Craig, a 22-year-old college student, major in nursing, has a unique attribute of being highly sociable, well known, and accessible to people. Although he has this broad network of peers that know him and communicate with him, Craig is one who has a small set of friends who he classifies as part of his inner circle:

> But I know that my senior year in high school helped prepare me, develop myself even more and sort of put me on the social scene making me more accessible to people and just showing myself off. I was for a while. I met a lot of people. I got to know them on a personal level than I had done a lot of people in the past. The friends that I have in high school I can count on one hand. The friends that I have made in college I could probably count on two hands, and they are just genuine relationships.

Craig noted that leaving his home at an early age and moving to a new state, along with his having to make new friends in an uncomfortable environment, may have contributed to his more "blocked off" nature in establishing a broad social network. He also

discussed that part of the uncomfortable environment he faced in classrooms had to do with his being the sole African American in the classroom: "I was usually the only black kid around and I was always the one that people would ask questions about and that frustrated me. I hated it, but those experiences helped built who I am today."

Unique to his college experience is Craig's observation that he does not see himself as "fitting in" at the college:

> I really don't see myself as fitting in. I see myself as surviving. I go to class. I leave campus. I go to class. I leave campus. I don't really develop the relationships that I would want to. I develop relationships with my professors because I believe that that is important to my success in college, but that's about all of the relationships that I've tried to develop. I think the rest is a waste of time.

Craig voices a conflict in regard to his fitting in by noting that he would like to develop more relationships at the college, but the only one he deems as essential to his college success is the one with his instructor for his class work. Even though Craig does acknowledge that he has attended a four-year university and enjoyed it so much that he was unable to manage his time to keep school as his priority, he claims that the relationships that could promote his success beyond the classroom in college are not a priority for him. And perhaps due to his "survival" aspect of college work, he has chosen the one relationship that he must secure in order to succeed in his current situation. As a full-time student and a full-time employee, Craig's plate of responsibility does not have room to add much more. In fact, Craig shared that he had worked in student government in the university school that he had attended, but the experience of having to leave the university due to low grades, too much socializing, and too little academic focus have led

him to shy away from any involvement in the college setting that is beyond the academic need to earn the degree. If indeed the college experience is both social and academic (Tinto, 1993), Craig's socialization through the college experience remains lacking in the connecting aspect of traits that tend to promote college persistence among students. Craig's "survival" reality seems to be situated more in his financial struggle.

In regard to finances, Craig experiences the challenges of needing financial resources to pay for dwelling, transportation, and regular expenses. His solution has been to work full time. This course of action of course creates the challenge of making his study time difficult. The dwelling issue points us back to Craig's recognition that one benefit from the university life that he has missed is the relationships that developed from living with or near students. For a community college, this relationship is lost. Although Craig once claims that he does not consider this essential, he does mention it again in the interview as something that he would like to have at the college:

> I would love to see on campus living. I think that, in itself, would create more relationships and bonding that you kind of yearn for. People just going down the hall to help with this and that, hang out, getting to know people better on a personal level … It would be much better for myself. I wouldn't have to juggle this and juggle that and [struggle to] get people's numbers and won't have to learn where they live, because we live in a city [rather than on a campus with common housing].

Craig also noted that the financial aid office became for him one of the most beneficial aspects of keeping him stable along his journey to persist in college: ". I would love to go in there and thank every single person in the financial aid office for helping me my

financial aid. That has been my biggest thing. My teachers have been great, but my financial aid has calmed me down a lot."

In regard to teachers, Craig noted that he has never had an African American as a teacher and has only with African Americans in a financial aid office or some area of student services, but never a classroom setting. "College and middle school, even though I went to [public schools] I never had a black teacher." Craig's interactions with degreed black men have mainly been through his church, a place where he can go for advice from people who can relate to his experiences. He also noted that an ex-husband of a close family member influenced him significantly in regard to his desire to persist in his education, not necessarily in the manner that one would expect:

> I saw who he was and how he carried himself, and I strived to be everything that
> he was not, and that's what helps me get through the day and press through the
> financial burdens. It's telling myself that I don't want to be like that person or
> anything near that person, so I strive to be over and beyond.

Craig's response to this negative image in his life is another form of counter-narrative to a stereotype that he does not want to influence his destiny in life.

And stereotyping, from Craig's perspective, has been a burden and distraction for him along his path toward college success. He claims that he does not worry much about stereotypes since "I try to be educated and carry myself in a proper way … because I feel that if I went to the depths of being that stereotypical black guy then I wouldn't get far in life because people wouldn't look at me seriously." Craig's response to stereotypes seems to add the counter-narrative nature of responding to the social images that society places before black males. Craig seems to be doing everything he can to not be

associated with the negative images that society has perpetuated through media images, stories, and studies. Additionally, Craig notes that he struggles with being the single representative for the black race:

> When I meet new people and they ask questions and, me having to be the spokesperson for all the black people in the world, I answer a question with a question and I [also] say, "I'm not the typical black person. I'm me. Don't ask me. I'm not Craig the black guy. I'm Craig." So I force them to get to know me. Instead of them thinking, "Hey there's a black guy and I should get to know him." I try to cut the color thing out. I think of myself as being colorblind. I don't stay to this color or that color, or stay with my peeps, but I like to get to know a lot of people, and personality is a key thing that I look for.

Emergent Themes

In the analysis of the data, I gave particular attention to themes that indicate, promote or require persistence from African American males through their college journeys. The following section will describe the research process for classifying the themes from the interview transcripts, attaining peer review checks, along with providing an overview of the broad categories for themes and the respective subcategories from which the broad themes were derived. After identifying the thematic categories and subcategories, specific discussion regarding some of the more significant participant quotations will be provided.

Analyzing the Interview Transcripts

After transcribing the interviews, I numbered each line of the interview transcripts and began the process of searching for themes using a general analytic strategy (Merriam,

1998; Stake, 1995) of identifying themes that emerged from the theory available in the

literature (i.e., Phenomenology, Critical Race Theory, Black Feminism, and Freire's

Critical Pedagogy), along with identifying the themes that the participants appeared to be

more focused on identifying as important. I also used observations of past experiences of

classroom work, along with personal experiences as an African American male, to serve

as potential identifiers of noteworthy themes.

Specifically, when a set of lines from the research represented what appeared to

be a theme, I captured the set of words in the interview transcript. Then I copied the

specific text to a different file and associated an identifying alphanumeric code to identify

the participant by letters and numbers so that only the collected words would stand out in

the reading of text. I then gave specific code names for each lined set of texts, with set of

numbered lines representing a specific theme. And multiple themes could be assigned to

sets of lines based on multiple readings and sorting, but intentionally I attempted to

assign single themes rather than multiple themes since the participants provided the text

to support a single theme. During the re-reading of multiple themes, I reviewed the

context of the original themes to match up the sorted themes with the original intentions

of the student participants during the interview process. This sorting, rereading, and

comparison to the original interview transcript process was made easier by entering the

line information in an EXCEL spread sheet that allowed for the numbered themes to be

re-evaluated and compared multiple times in a systematic way, both visually and

programmatically through the EXCEL sorting feature.

Another benefit of having the items in EXCEL and using it for coding was that I

was able to use the mail merge feature of the EXCEL program to create individual 3 X 5

cards (see example, Figure 4.1) that would include the specific quotation and the associated theme (numbered):

Figure 4.1: Index Card with Data Theme
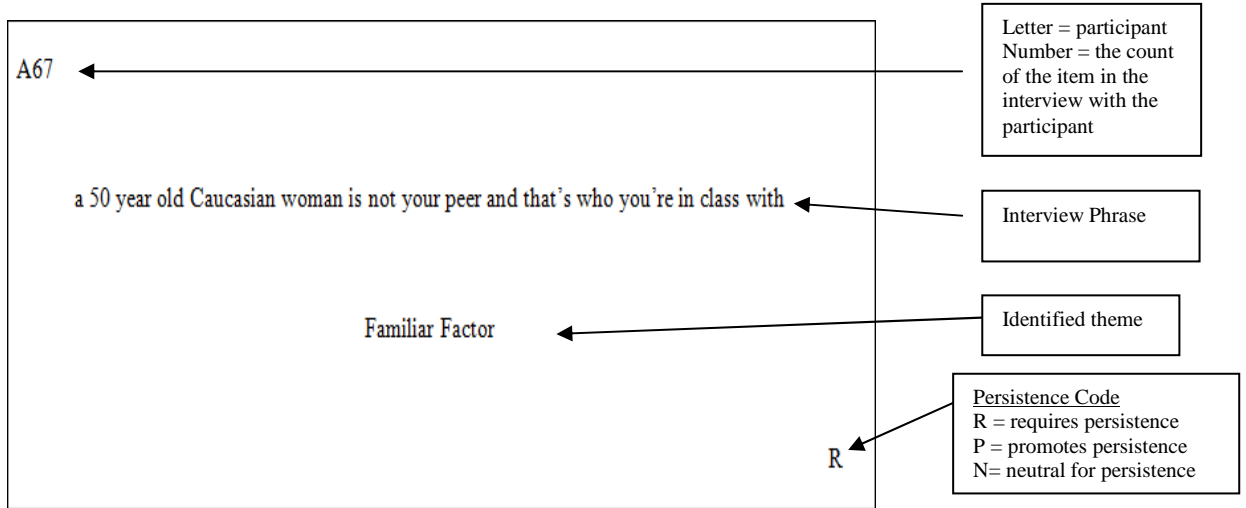
This card creation allowed me to perform ongoing sorts with physical cards as well as look at the computer screen and compare the themes on a single row of information in spreadsheet form.

In the thematic content analysis of the interview transcripts, 372 factor items were identified, with the overall factor items distributed across the four broad thematic categories of Family and Community Membership, Institutional, Managing College and Life, and Personal Values and Goals, with significant distinctions within and between category Types.

Peer Review Checks of the Analyzed Data

In order to address the trustworthiness of the findings and categorization, I attained three peer reviews from professionals in the field of education who work with and have conducted research regarding African American males. The first step of the

peer review process included providing the reviewers with the transcripts and asking

them to identify emerging themes. After the reviewers provided their themes, I provided

them with the content analysis summary tables of the emergent themes that had been

established and asked for feedback on whether the reviewer themes were captured in the

tables adequately or if suggested reconsideration of themes was recommended. For all

three reviewers, the feedback was that the content analysis tables of emergent themes

were comprehensive and representative of similar findings that the reviewers had

uncovered in their analyses. One of the reviewers, however, posited an additional theme

to be considered, one of unclear communication between participants and teachers and

the institution; this reviewer suggested that communications challenges may exist

between the participants and instructors and the institution due to the cultural and social

differences that were not shared by the members of the institution and their instructors.

Although this theme does not seem to carry over through all of the participants, it is one

to consider for the recommendations for future research.

Content Analysis Findings Overview

Beyond the one observation made by a reviewer for further consideration, the

subtypes of the study provide another way of reviewing the data for noteworthy findings.

Table 4.1 represents a list the types and subtypes, sorted by frequency, with the complete

list of quotations with the applicable type and subtype codes also available in Appendix I:

Table 4.1: Subtypes and Types with Counts for Items

Type	Count	Subtype	Count	Promotes Persistence	Requires Persistence
Institutional	139	Stereotyping	49	0	49
		Teacher Mentoring	26	23	3
		Teacher Style	14	7	7
		Familiar Factor	14	8	6
		Suggestions	10	9	1
		Teacher Communication	8	6	2
		Congratulate early … [for] they are smart	5	0	5
		AA females versus males	5	2	3
		Teach him, just the same as everyone else	5	5	0
		Teacher Discipline	3	3	0
Family and Community Membership	90	Family Involvement	38	29	9
		Community Membership	27	21	6
		Family Background	22	13	9
		Role in Family/Community	2	1	1
		Relatable Story	1	1	0
Personal Values and Goals	75	School as Priority	42	28	14
		Expectations/Goals Matching	21	12	9
		Without [the goal] I could not breathe	11	9	2
		Sense of Urgency	1	1	0
Managing College and Life	68	Self Sufficiency	27	6	21
		Time Management	14	8	6
		Definition of Success	10	10	0
		Task/Academic Precision/Skills	8	5	3
		Balancing Academic and Personal	5	0	5
		Financial Management	2	0	2
		Resource Usage	2	2	0
TOTAL	**372**				

The table further sorts the information by whether the students brought up subtopics that promote or require persistence, since the response to these factors will vary if the item helps build/promote persistence in African American males versus discourages/requires persistence to overcome. In considering how the persistence factors promote or require persistence, the sorting reveals a new lens in viewing the broader types.

For **Institutional** Types, African American male participants more frequently noted Stereotyping as requiring persistence to overcome barriers for college success, with

Teacher Mentoring more frequently noted as promoting persistence toward college success. Of course, since the count does not necessarily indicate the degree of the significance, I do not identify the most frequently mentioned subtypes as the most significant challenge for the students. I do, however, note that the students' member checking process (Patton, 2002) confirmed these categories and counts, with participants confirming that the findings seemed applicable to their experiences.

For the **Family and Community Membership** Type, African American male participants more frequently noted Family Involvement and Community Membership as promoting persistence toward college success. The review literature concurs that African American males tend to persist in greater numbers when a strong family and community support system are in place (Palmer & Young, 2009; Perrakis, 2008; Peters, 2007; Robertson & Mason, 2008; Ross, 1998; Wood, 2010; Wood & Turner, 2011). In contrast, when considering the barriers to persistence, Family Involvement and Family Background were discussed as sometimes creating obstacles for participants as they were on their journeys for college success. In these instances, students had to learn how to balance the negative influences or lack of experience in navigating the college systems that their families had, a common obstacle for first generation or minority students (Murphy & Hicks, 2006).

Most significantly, for the **Personal Values and Goals** Type, African American male student participants mentioned factors that promote persistence twice as often as they mentioned factors that require persistence to overcome obstacles, with African American male participants more frequently noting that having School as a Priority as promoting persistence toward college success. This focus on having school as a priority

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fits appropriately with Tinto's (1993) research in regard to intention and commitment. When the participants have identified school as a priority, they have made a connection with of intending to complete the degree with the sacrifices required to attain the degree, on both a personal and academic level.

For the **Managing College and Life** Type, African American male participants more frequently noted Self Sufficiency as requiring persistence to overcome barriers for college success, with Time Management and Having a Clear Definition of a Successful College Student more frequently noted as promoting persistence toward college success. Also, of significance, as it relates to Tinto's research in regard to students with intention and commitment are more likely to persist (Tinto, 1993), presents a question about the African American male students who have a clear definition of success. Perhaps those who have a clearer, realistic focus on this self-established definition as it relates to their view of their own success tend to have a stronger commitment to completing college.

Noteworthy Findings for Institutional Factors Type

When considering each of the Types, 139 items for **Institutional Factors** emerged, and ten subtype themes were identified during this sorting process across the six student participants. In the sorting process, I sorted and combined specific phrases based by commonality.

In looking across the participant interviews, descriptions of the college experience seemed to represent how participants defined their institutional context, so the items were grouped in a broad theme of Institutional Factors based on creating an category that encompasses the subcategories that are more closely tied to emic representations (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995) and words used by the participants. For example, when a participant

states, "I have no African American males that are pursuing degrees that are friends of mine," this emic statement has been placed in a subcategory that reflects common statements made by mutiple student participants, with the words of at least one of the participants being used in definign the subcategory. For example, Trey mentioned "Familiar Factor" and also used the phrase "familiarity thing" when discussing his experience. I attempted to use labels that reflected the wording from the participants when possible.

Table 4.2 lists the ten Institutional subtypes and their frequency counts.

Table 4.2. Institutional Subtypes with Counts

Institutional Factors	Total Number
Stereotyping	49
Teacher Mentoring	29
Familiar Factor	14
Teacher Style	14
Suggestions for institution	10
Teacher Communication	8
AA Females versus males	5
Congratulate early … [for] they are smart	5
Teach him, just the same as everyone else	5
Teacher Discipline	3
Total	139 Items

For example, all participants addressed examples of stereotyping in their interviews, with the subtype representing the most frequently mentioned item during the interviews. When Trey mentioned stereotyping, he commented that he experienced general reactions from institutional encounters that implied, "Wow for an African American male he's got it together." And Trey's response to the issue was, "I'm just the same as the other guy sitting next to me and I'm a man." He represented a common sentiment among the participants that the institutional expectations were often of surprise when individuals discovered that the males knew and practiced successful strategies or

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had managed to overcome significant obstacles in life. Craig echoed this sentiment by saying that he was often classified as the "token black guy in the group" because he was often expected to be the spokesperson for all black males since he was present in a classroom or a situation that required an institutional understanding of a situation. And Fred further explains this dilemma by noting, "If I don't fit into the stereotypes for black people they say you're not black ," a tendency that Kunjufu (1988) describes as a barrier for African American academic success.

In contrast to this shock that bothered Trey, Jerome brought up the institutional tendency to caution the males to not be like those in their group that were associated with "the bad bunch": "Don't be like them; don't do this; don't do that, or whatever." Lucas voiced concerns that "[some instructors] think that I would disrupt class or start trouble or problem in the class with teachers or students … I know probably what some teachers think, but I don't worry about it." That he and the other participants felt this burden on a broad scale certainly points to a concern since it is a clear theme, but the magnitude of the problem needs to be further investigated.

One aspect of the stereotyping theme that warrants understanding on an institutional level is that the common trend that that these participants described is what Sue (2010) identifies as a microaggression. These daily encounters that sum up to an institutional atmosphere and context that leaves individuals with a sentiment that they are devalued or have become targets of subtle messages that separately do not attack or target indiv iduals but amount to a group feeling are detrimentally powerful. Microaggressions, according to Sue, Capodilupo, et al. (2007) maintain a power to harm because of the

invalidating, demeaning, and insulting messages that become part of what is considered normal encounters within an institution.

The harmful, unwelcoming environment becomes an institutional norm that can be identified by analyzing institutional demographics such as the lack of faculty representation of color in comparison to the student population (Alexander & Moore, 2008; American Federation of Teachers, 2010; Strayhorn, 2008), along with the the lack of administrative representation in the academic areas of faculty hiring when neither the committees or the hiring supervisors are people of color, the disproportianate number of people of color in student services rather than the academic areas, and the disproportionate representation of students of color in developmental education courses but not in honors programs or science and math majors. From an institutional perspective, the signs reflect a problem, and a nonresponse may suggest to students that the institution considers students of color to be incapable of adequate performance in those area of academic work. Granted, many of the problems are inherited from prior educational experiences, but the higher educational community must address the circumstance rather than allowing the situation to remain the same or worsen.

Additionally, the hidden message for students when they do not see and interact with more faculty and academic administrators of color when they seek courses or assistance with academic issues is that advancement is not probable for people of color—people who look like the student participants, even with advanced degrees. Several participants addressed this lack of representation in what I labeled as a Familiar Factor for the participants' college experiences. Jerome, for example, claimed that he did not know where to fiind African American males with degrees: "African American males

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with degrees—I haven't met any … wouldn't even know where to begin to meet people like that …" And Craig further noted that his college and prior educational experiences were void of African American male instructors: "I've never had an African American as a teacher the only ones that I've dealt with in the education system were in the financial aid office."

When considering subcategories, the researcher rationale for placing the items within the Institutional Factors category was based on how the students perceived the items as part of their school experience that they had no control over for the setting. Certainly, the students could establish coping strategies to address the surrounding institutional setting, but the institution could also look at the setting and decide if possible institutional responses would be appropriate. For example, Lucas, in regard to Teacher Discipline, indicates that his teachers were always strict and made sure he did his work, even to the degree that the teachers made him redo unacceptable work. Lucas' acknowledgement of high expectations speaks to the clear need for teachers to have high expectations of African American males (Harper, 2009; Yates, et al, 2008).

From an institutional, classroom response, this could encourage some teachers to consider revision or resubmission of work that does not meet a standard defined in the course. Of course, this type of institutional evalution needs to be considered within the context of college-level appropriateness of allowing students to expect that they may have a second chance to do work. Some instructors will find the approach acceptable to offer a limited number of resubmissions, while other course instructors will consider it dismanteling of the standards of the higher expectations required of a college-level experience (Gallien & Peterson, 2005; Jones, 2000; Rovai, Gallien, & Stiff-Willliams,

2007). As an institution, instructors and administrators need to decide how both ends of the spectrum affect student success and make those choices and the related outcomes become a part of the decision-making discussion that instructors and administrators have when designing curriculum and providing professional development resources at the college.

When considering the next subtype, teacher mentoring, participants identified the relationships within the institutions to be a positive persistence factor for them. For Craig, he noted that the relationship with his professor was the only one he established since he associated this relationship as part of academic career: "I develop relationships with my professors because I believe that that is important to my success in college, but that's about all of the relationships." And Gordon added a depth to the understanding of how this mentor relationship unfolded for him by noting that the mentoring concept equated to more than mere conversations but had an ethical note as well: "I don't know if relationship is the right word, but just to set a good example." This layer of consideration points to the need for institutional consideration of how to provide positive role models as mentors for students who not only give good advice but live the lives that students desire to emulate (Gallien & Peterson, 2005).

Another aspect of the teacher mentoring may simply be in the image that the mentors provide—a sign that accomplishments can happen for African American males. For many African American males, the image of President Barack Obama as a black man who has achieved not only success as a lawyer, professor, and father, but also as an elected president of the United States, becomes the time of image that promotes persistence among African American males. President Obama provides the image on a

broader, national scale, but the local mentors provide this image on a daily basis through the work they do in the community, through their educational attainments, through the visible accomplishments that the students see. Trey voiced this sentiment when he identified the significance of seeing the degrees of his mentors in their offices, noting in his interviews that he looks at those degrees when he goes into an office to meet with instructors: "I can go see those degrees hanging up. It lets me know that it is possible."

Not as widely discussed in the interviews but of significance were subtypes of familiar factor and teacher style, along with a few other subtypes that could certainly be further understood as part of the institutional factors that promote or require persistence (Rovai, Gallien, & Stiff-Willliams, 2007). For the familiar factor, participants had a concern for not seeing as many people who looked like them, whether this be a peer or a faculty member. The participants had a clear desire to see others who had similar goals within the institution, and most of the participants searched out this connection by joining student groups that would allow them to be more aware of what other African Americans are doing locally and nationally And the teacher styles associated with the classes often pointed to the lack of curriculum that was interactive in nature.

Gordon pointed out that he favored more discussion: "I like to be in the classroom with the teacher and students. I like that environment; I like class discussions, because I like to talk." And Jerome noted that his preference was for more hands-on activites that allowed him to better work through problems: "I'm like a visual person in terms of hands on and seeing it done at the same time." These are not necessarily the types of classrooms that the participants encountered for a typical college course, but it was definitely the preference for the participants.

Noteworthy Findings for Family and Community Membership Type

For the 90 items for **Family and Community Membership**, five subtype themes were identified for the six student participants. The etic category of Family and Community Membership was used to capture the broader subcategories that were more closely tied to emic student discussions about what they found to be part of the relationships they had established with their communities as a type of support structure, closeness, or responisibility to as part of the journey of completing college. In the sorting process, I sorted and combined specific phrases based by commonality.

Table 4.3 lists the five subtypes for Family and Community Membership and their frequency counts.

Table 4.3: Family and Community Membership Subtypes with Counts

Family and Community Membership	Total Number
Family Involvement	38
Community Membership	27
Family Background	22
Role in family/community	2
Relatable Story	1
Total	90 Items

When considering these subcategories, the researcher rationale for placing the items in the Family and Community Membership category was based on how the students perceived the items as part of their support system of family members, friends, and community ties. Family involvment for the students entailed having a strong support system of family that asked them how they were doing in school, supported them for their functions, and made clear that education was a priority that would be an achievement of pride for both the individual and the family ("African American Males in College Report," 2009; Cuyjet, 2006; Garibaldi, 2007; Jones, 2001). Gordon best expressed this

sentiment by explaining how his family has encouraged him through his educational journey: "They encourage me … as I am pursuing my education to help to pave the way for the future kids, and they also just talk to me about the challenges that they've had and what to expect or just to always keep focused and to not get off track." Not only does Gordon identify the encouraging words, but he also points to the identification of barriers to persistence that his family helps him to see. His family serves as a sounding board for solutions along with offering him some examples of what they had done well or wished they had done differently in dealing with some of the various obstacles for college success.

For some of the participants, the community membership entailed a strong connection with giving back to the community that had meant so much in their development as a person, along with a strong desire to help others prepare for the college journey. Both Gordon and Trey wanted to ensure that educational attainment included giving back to the community. Gordon looked at his achievements as an opportunity to be a role model, while Trey had a strong desire to make sure that African American males took their roles in the community, defining their roles in a way that promoted positive influence for the young and the community as a whole: "You have a spot in that community. It's just a matter of you taking it."

A striking characteristic for many of the students was a realization that their mothers played a strong part in their desire for success for educational accomplishments (D'Augulla & Hershberger, 1993; Halpern-Felsher et al., 1997). Of the students who mentioned their mothers, several noted how their mothers had attainded some college or had a degree, while their fathers did not have degrees, a fact not uncommon in literature

(D'Augulla & Hershberger, 1993) nor surprising since African American males have been lagging behind in educational attainment with the onset of higher education in the United States (see Table 4.4 for a summary of graduation information for parents of participants).

Table 4.4: Parents Attending or Graduating from College

Participant	Mother Attended/Graduated	Father Attended/Graduated
Trey	Yes/No	Yes/Uncertain
Jerome	No/No	No/No
Craig	Yes/Yes	No/No
Fred	Yes/No	Yes/No
Gordon	Yes/Yes	No/No
Lucas	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes

While the participants noted that mothers were critical in their pursuit of degrees, the fathers also played a role in the college journeys.   Trey believes his father had earned an Associate Degree, but he has some uncertainty because he has heard both that his father has a degree and that he had not completed his degree. This uncertainty, for Trey, serves to inspire Trey to finish his degree due to his desire to avoid the stigma associated with noncompletion:

> I have the positive examples in my life, my brother and my father and the
> negative also from my brother and father because they didn't complete school, but
> seeing the stigma that's on us, that's on me, because it's on us, that made me just
> say OK [I have to earn my degree], even at a young age, I said that as an African
> American male I have to go to school. I have to do this because they expect us to

be dead and the funny thing about it is that there are times with all the media

consumption … that message seeps in there [to me] with movies like The Boys in

the Hood. A lot of negatives have come from those movies, but I was able to

grasp the main concept in the movie that you have to go to school and education

is important; you don't want to die in the streets.

For the interview, Trey noted that his father's military connection provided the needed

benefits that allowed college attendance for his father, regardless of whether his father

completed his higher education or not.

This realization of the need for financial resources also resonated with other

participants in that their male models often were only able to attend college if they

attended military or had completed their degrees saddled with extreme debt. Fred, who

has been experiencing the financial challenges of the college journey himself, noted that

the stress of searching for how to afford college frustrates him: "I'm the only biological

son of my mother and father … they want me to succeeed, but it's the money situation

that has been hindering me …." Trey added that he saw how his brother had attained a

college degree but still had to work hard because he owed so much money to pay off the

degree: "I saw how much debt he was in." The male role models that influence the males

provide both positive and negative experiences because the realistic preview that the role

models provide is both one of significant struggle that accompanies the great

achievement, even when the higher education has provided a better life situation.

Noteworthy Findings for Personal Values and Goals Type

For the 75 **Personal Values and Goals**, four subtype themes were identified for

the six student participants. The etic category of Personal Values and Goals was used to

capture the broader subcategories that were more closely tied to emic student discussions

about what they found to be essential values and perspectives that had contributed to the

part of their goal to complete higher education. In the sorting process, I sorted and

combined specific phrases based by commonality. The table below lists the four

subtypes and the frequency counts.

Table 4.5: Personal Values and Goals Subtypes with Counts

Personal Values and Goals	Total Number
School as a Priority	42
Expectations/Goals Matching	21
Without [the goal] I could not breathe	11
Sense of Urgency	1
Total	75 Items

When considering these subcategories, the rationale for placing the items in the

Personal Values and Goals category was based on how the students perceived the items

as vital characteristics of a student who wants to attain a higher educational degree or

certificate. For the subtype of School as a Priority, participants noted a sense of placing

education as a long term investment that required sacrifice and observing that some of

their peers would not make it with them. Gordon pointed to this concern when he noted

that he had to be a role model for his peers even when they were abandoning their

common goal to pursue academic success: "A couple of my classmates had to drop out

after just a semester and didn't even try . . . I saw how they always acted, always late or

never showed up, but I didn't try to judge them or criticize them but tried to show them

another way …" As Gordon experienced, this constant need to balance priorities with friendship is part of the college persistence struggle (Tinto, 1993).

If African American males do not prepare for this dilemma, they will struggle with this challenge, especially since this needed attribute for college persistence often conflicts with the Family and Community membership factors in the desire to be associated with the local communities in which the students live daily. Jerome best articulates the dilemma of having to prioritize beyond friendship to achieving the academic goals when he discusses how he recognized that his goals required a different path than some of his friends: "I just always knew that I wanted more … some of my classmates [when asked], 'Are you guys going to college?' they would say, 'Uhm.. no.' I sort of wondered why they didn't [think they needed to go to college]. I asked why and some of them felt like they didn't need to [attend college]." Clearly, Jerome had to make a decision, one that placed him at the door of higher education and separated him to some degree from his peers in his neighborhood. Trey expressed this note clearly when he stated, "If you want something to stay, then go to school. Staying power is just real really important to me … I decide on what's important to me, based on my religion." This factor of religion, internalized on a more individual perspective, serves as both a Community Membership and a promoter of persistence under Trey's Personal Values and Goals.

For Jerome, an additional comparison to the African American female captured the perspective that represented the sentiment voiced by the other participants in the other subcategories in that the noncompletion of a higher education must be urgent in the daily pursuit of learning and the associated prioritizing that accompanies time with friends,

asking questions in the classroom or after class, soliciting help from tutors, or whatever strategies or support structures are needed in the journey to complete higher education. Craig's statement that supported Jerome's thoughts was that some itmes simply must be given up in order to achieve college success: "I'm just going to have to cut some stuff out to make myself successful and maybe more of the personal life needs to be cut out."

When considering the expectations and goals matching for the participants and their institutions of higher education, the common thread was that a "degree opens doors" (Trey) and that education had to be so important in the lives of the students that it was the equivalent of breathing, as Jerome expressed it: "Every time I wake up in the morning. Every time I go to sleep. It's just like the air that I breathe. Without that I could not breathe … being out for a while just made me want to go back to school more and more … It felt like something was missing. If I just stopped going to school period that would really eat me up."   Although Jerome has struggled off and on with semester attendance, he remains in school to complete his degree because he desire more from himself and he agrees with Trey's point that the degree is a door to the personal goals that he has. And this doorway that these African American males seek to open is one that requires significant investment—personally, socially, and academically. Lucas acknowledged this investment by noting that college is a continual struggle fro him because of the shift in his workload and the ownership he must have to complete his education: "The teachers go through it faster than in high school. In high school the teachers would go through a whole class period trying to explain something to you, but in college it's just straight through it and they're done."

Noteworthy Findings for Managing College and Life Type

For the 68 **Managing College and Life**, seven subtype themes were identified for the six student participants. The etic category of Managing College and Life was used to capture the broader subcategories that were more closely tied to emic student discussions about what they found to be essential in managing their personal, academic, and work concerns in order to attain their higher education. In the sorting process, I sorted and combined specific phrases based by commonality. Refer to Table 4.6 for the list of the seven subtypes and the frequency counts.

Table 4.6: Managing College and Life Subtypes with Counts

Managing College and Life	Total Number
Self Sufficiency	27
Time Management	14
Task/Academic Precision/Skills	12
Having Definition of a Successful College Student	10
Balancing academic and personal	5
Financial Management	2
Resource Usage	2
Total	68 Items

When considering these subcategories, the rationale for placing the items in the Managing College and Life category was based on how the students perceived the items as critical in regard to handling the personal, academic, and career needs that surface while they pursue a degree. What stands out most as a subtype in Managing College and Life is the Self-Sufficiency category in that most of the items have an asociated finacial connection and also requires building persistance in order to overcome these challenges to college success.

The Self Sufficiency item on the surface seems to be mainly financial, but an underlying message that participants identified was a desire to support themselves, such

as with affording a place to stay, having adequate transportation, and having the necessary materials for class work—books, computers, supplies, class outings, or other items that enhance the educational experience. Trey noted that his primary struggle was that most of his college life has included an inordinate amount of time working and "taking care of myself." While three of the six participants lived at home, only one of them relied on his parents to pay for tuition and did not work. The other participants worked to pay for their transportation and other bills and were planning to pay for their ongoing education.

This general need to take care of themselves was a more common theme among the participants, reflecting a desire to be self sufficient (Bonner & Bailey, 2006, p. 33-34), even though they may not have the financial resources to do so. Jerome articulated this challenge when he noted that he rarely relies on his parents for support: "Most of the time I provide for myself … I have to look out for myself; they don't buy my clothes, and my shoes.' And Trey noted that he has a family to support on top of investing in his academic future: " I'm trying to pay for college; I have a job, I have a family; I have to make time for work." This "making time" for work is for the participants the conflict between having school as a priority and having the necessities of life met (Perrakis, 2008; Robertson & Mason, 2008; Wood, 2010; Wood & Turner, 2011).

The challenge for some individuals is what makes the African American males different from other student populations. And this excellent question can be better understood by considering that a higher percentage of African American males come from families in which they receive no financial support and their incomes are typically lower than any of the other student subgroups at a community college (Allen 1992;

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Hardaway & McLoyd, 2009). Fred points out that this is not an extraordinary circumstance that should make the African American male situation be highlighted: "I think the level of difficulty of [going to college is] would probably be around the same for other minority groups or other group of people that have low income. Because a smaller amount of people with low incomes [can afford to attend college]." But what should be noted from an economic and social perspective is that when a segment of a student population is disproportionately represented within the poverty group, the implications to persistence are of more of a concern for this population. So Fred's statement, one that many argue, is valid: economics is a critical predictor of success.

Unfortunately, what most people ignore is that the economics, when analyzed, has racial disparities that place those of specific races at a deficit because of overrepresntation. Zip code analysis (Essig, 2011; Hager, 2012) reveals that certain communities that are more defined by race have resulting health challenges in higher proportion to other communities, lower educational attainment, and lower income potential, among a myriad of other predictors of equity within society from an economic perspective (Littles, Bowers, & Gilmer, 2007; Noguera, 2008).

While all of the students discussed the financial and time-related challenges they face in achieving success in college, Gordon identified a critical element related to time management that relates to the other subcategories. He indicated, "What you see is what you do," focusing on the need for students to have an environment that shows them how to manage life situations that give them a sense of control or forward thinking about the consequences of poor choices and benefits of long term, delayed gratification in holding off on the rewards that can happen when life is managed well. Craig also noted that he

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struggles with the mere juggling of life with class attendance and work: "I go to class. I

go to work. I go home. Struggling for time!" Even Gordon, who does live with his

mother, noted that he worked 32 hours a week, "So it's 9 to 6 in the days when I'm not at

school … I bring my homework to work sometimes, so in my free time or on my lunch

break, I do my homework. But that's not exactly where I want to do it." These very real

conditions of time management positioned next to self sufficiency create a significant

challenge to African American males since much effort is required to succeeed, but much

of the contributing factors are also out of the control of the students.

Another important finding that appeared to counter the challenges of self

sufficiency was how students compared their academic achievements to their perceived

self-definitions of college success. Consider the following participant-provided

definitions (in Table 4.7) of success compared to their self-assessments of their academic

achievements:

Table 4.7. Students' Definitions and Self-Assessment of Success

Student	Participants' Definitions for Success	Self Evaluation of Themselves from Own Definition of Success
Trey	shows up prepared … prepared ahead of time.	I am a successful student; however, I wasn't fully prepared if something socially goes wrong to still be prepared to continue on academically.
Jerome	good grades … class on time, trying your best … doing your work and getting it in on time	[I am a] hard worker, very determined, very persistent, very goal oriented and very articulate … willing to do whatever it takes
Craig	An associate with a bachelor's degree in at least 4 or 5 years in the degree that they want to be in … doing the degree that you love … One who manages their time well, is making good grades	In the beginning stages of college, I would've been a much better candidate for a successful college student. Later down the line, I started putting other things ahead of school.
Fred	[one who practices] time management … It is about knowing what you want	I haven't really mastered the time management part yet; I'm still following up to make sure I work on that.
Gordon	Someone who knows, not exactly where they want to go, but they have to have a clear direction of just what path they want to go … focused … or if they get off track, they can just get back on track.	I would say [I am a successful student].
Lucas	one who wants to achieve something in life	I want to achieve something in life; I do know that. I see myself really going further and getting an associate degree and working harder to get as high as I can in life.

In reviewing the participants' definitions of success, I could see how the responses helped

capture a clearer understanding of how Tinto's (1993) Intention and Commitment Traits

become a reasonable representation of themselves in the context of their definitions for a

successful student. Fred best articulated this by noting that a successful student is one

who knows what he wants in life: "It is about knowing what you want when you get there

and being aware of the task that's going to be at hand." And Gordon provided an even more comprehensive definition for success: "have a clear direction of just what path they want to go into ... someone who is focused … if they get off track, they can just get back on track."

These definition statements suggest a level of commitment that the students have self-evaluated for themselves, a critical basis of reflective learning and an essential factor in helping students decide if they have realistic achievement for the goals that should reflect an intention to graduate from college. From a Tinto (1993) theoretical framework, this definition and related self-assessment serves as the initial steps to provide a possible measurement tool to predict college success—from semester-by-semester assessment to final graduation.

When considering these definitions of success and students' self assessment of their skills, the participants' activity of defining and assessing fit quite nicely as an intersection of theories from Freire and Tinto. For Freire, the participants, in defining themselves, have the potential to emancipate themselves from their barriers by their having a deeper understanding of what is required to overcome the challenges they face to college persistence. The interview itself served as an emancipatory device for the participants in the study, but it can be expanded beyond the interviews to other students, perhaps on a semester-by-semester basis, as an emancipatory strategy in college persistence. When pairing Freire's Emancipatory (2002) process with Tinto's Student Retention (1993), it is possible to address the persistence issue from intention and commitment. Once students know their weaknesses from a self assessmnet perpective, they can decide if their intentions and their commitments are to continue in the

educational process—now fully understanding if their definitions of success are going to lead them to a path of college persistence.

Noteworthy Findings by Subtype

Another way of analyzing the themes from the participant interviews is to look at some of the most significant themes based on the most frequently mentioned subtypes. And, again, I made special note that more frequent counts for a theme does not always indicate most important theme, although it did point to a frequent, common level of awareness of the theme by all participants—still a noteworthy finding. When considering the subtypes, I found that 11 of the subtypes were mentioned more than 14 times across all of the participant interviews, representing a sum of 294 of the total 372 items identified in the interviews, 79% of the total items. This high percentage fits well within the manegerial Pareto principle (Grosfeld-Nir, Ronen, & Kozlovsky, 2007) that allows managers to focus on key items or categories based on an 80/20 rule that 80% of the issues can be represented by 20% of the resources. In this case, the top 11 subtypes for the participant interviews represent the resources that unveil the nearly 80% of the subtype themes, with Stereotyping, School as Priority, Family Involvement, Community Membership, Self Sufficiency, Teacher Mentoring, Family Background, Expectations/Goal Matching, Teacher Style, Familiar Factor, and Time Management as the top subtypes mentioned by the participants.

When viewing the subtypes in rank order (see Table 4.8), I could more clearly

identify how the participants' experiences pointed directly to the literature about African

American male experiences; however, the experiences reflected a level of race

consciousness through stereotyping that served as a constant barrier for participants as

they learned to navigate college:

Table 4.8: Subtypes in Frequency Order

Subtype	Count	Promotes Persistence	Requires Persistence
Stereotyping	49	0	49
School as Priority	42	28	14
Family Involvement	38	29	9
Community Membership	27	21	6
Self Sufficiency	27	6	21
Teacher Mentoring	26	23	3
Family Background	22	13	9
Expectations/Goals Matching	21	12	9
Teacher Style	14	7	7
Familiar Factor	14	8	6
Time Management	14	8	6
(Above items represent 79% of the identified items for the interview, representing the significant items for an 80/20 Pareto principle level)			
Without [the goal] I could not breathe	11	9	2
Suggestions	10	9	1
Definition of Success	10	10	0
Teacher Communication	8	6	2
Task/Academic Precision/Skills	8	5	3
Congratulate early … [for] they are smart	5	0	5
AA females versus males	5	2	3
Teach him, just the same as everyone else	5	5	0
Balancing Academic and Personal	5	0	5
Teacher Discipline	3	3	0
Role in Family/Community	2	1	1
Financial Management	2	0	2
Resource Usage	2	2	0
Relatable Story	1	1	0
Sense of Urgency	1	1	0

And examining the persistence traits associated with the ranked subtypes reveals

that the most mentioned subtype also requires persistence to overcome as a barrier to

success—on a 100% level. On the other hand, when reviewing the other 79% of the

items, students identified both categories that promoted or required persistence,
suggesting that the single subtype of Stereotyping as always a barrier for their success
posed a most important categorythat needs to be addressed for African American male
success on both an institutional and personal level, along with needing the support of
family and community.

Additionally, on initial inspection, some may say that the remaining 21% of the
items could be disregarded as subtype. Instead, I contend that the remaining items could
be collapsed into the majority categories as unique, contextualized aspects of those
categories. For example, the "Without [the goal] I could not breathe subtype could be
merged with the "School as a Priority" theme, but merging the two subtypes would lose
the contrasting aspects of the two subtypes. I found importance in leaving the 21% of the
categories in tact since those subtypes represented a nuance of difference that explained
the context of the participants' experiences.

Noteworthy Findings by Persistence

Also, when considering the general way of looking at the items by promoting or
requiring persistence, I found importance in looking at the top subtypes that promote
persistence and the top subtypes that require persistence (Refer to Table 4.9):

Table 4.9: Top Suptypes for Promoting and Requiring Persistence

Top Subtypes that Promote Persistence	Top Subtypes that Require Persistence
1. Family Involvement	1. Stereotyping
2. School as a Priority	2. Self Sufficiency
3. Teacher Mentoring	
4. Community Membership	

For the subtypes that promoted persistence toward college success (Family Involvment, School as a Priority, Teacher Mentoring, and Community Membership), these four categories represented 48% of the total items that promote persistence (209), nearly half of all of the positive persistence items that participants mentioned during the interviews. In Comparison, for the subtypes that required persistence to overcome barriers to college success (Stereotyping and Self Sufficiency), these two categories represented 43% of the total items participants mentioned during the interview that require persistence (163) to overcome barriers to college success.

And on a broader level, when comparing the overall total 209 positive persistence items (56% of the total 372 items) to the overall total 163 negative persistence items (44% of the total items), I noted that the total number of of positive persistence items exceeded the negative persistence items, but only by a little more than half, suggesting that the perceived 372 college experiences were positive overall for the case study results but only slightly positive toward persistence. While it was good that the findings were more positive, it did not lean heavily toward positive persistence experiences, providing a definite signal that the perceived experiences of African American males is a fragile one that can be tilted in either direction—making the the institutional, family, community, personal values and goals, along with management of college experiences, highly important in considering how the ratio of positive versus negative persistence influences relate to overall success in college.

Addressing the Research Gap

The findings for the six participants shed new light on the context of what distinguishes the African American male experience from other students who share similar struggles. Specifically, previous studies do not contextualize issues of

- self-sufficiency beyond financial support;

- how African American males perceive their female counterparts as being raised with different sets of expectations that influence applicable behaviors in the community college setting; or

- how peer and institutional "amazed gazes" that serve as forms of social and institutional stereotyping and racism are part of the African American male daily experience.

When considering self-sufficiency, gender expectations, and stereotyping, this study helps to define the African American male community college experience to distinguish him from white males, other males from underrepresented populations, African American females, and from non-African American females who may struggle with similar yet not the same types of barriers.

For one part of the African American male experience, self-sufficiency is more than merely being able to pay for tuition. Craig, for example, represented a strong desire for "survival" in community college in that he needed to choose essential relationships at the college with faculty, but not with student groups, because he could not afford to build a student social support system at school since much of his already-committed time included maintaining a full-time job and studying. For Craig, self-sufficiency meant more than being able to pay for his bills and tuition. For Craig, self-sufficiency included

being equipped to have a decent, respectable job. Craig expressed a dire need to take care of his family, noting in his interview that this "taking care of family" should not be an optional priority for African American males, but what he had concluded is fundamental to his expectations for himself and others—and should be what others view as critical as well. Pairing the family stance with the "survival" perspective sheds a different slant on what these males view as self-sufficient when they struggle for success at community colleges.

For the self-sufficient African American male, the community college experience includes showing others (and himself) that they can take care of themselves, their families, along with their being positive role models in their communities. These attributes are critical in establishing a sense of self sufficiency as an African American male. Trey epitomizes the need to not only take care of his family, but also he wants his children and his community to see him as a model of fathering as he is guides his son into male hood and into prioritizing academics. Additionally, Trey believes that he must give back to his local community, along with showing others within his community that he cares enough to remain connected with his family, with his friends, and—maybe more importantly—with those who need to know that there are options beyond stealing, cheating, and destruction of community buildings. For Craig, the challenge of self-sufficiency appears to have disconnected him from the traditional college experience of socializing with other students. While he admits that he is a highly social person, he also notes that this part of his college life must be sacrificed in order for him to succeed as a student. He has chosen to abandon the possibility of connecting with other African

American males at the community college because that would not allow him to have the self-sufficient part of supporting himself with a job, a career.

The conflict of self-sufficiency relates to how it tears apart some of the very programs that research contends helps to build community (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Cuyjet, 1997; Gallien & Peterson, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Craig and Trey fully represent this challenge from an institutional perspective. In order for both Trey and Craig to survive at a community college, they need jobs to support transportation needs, housing accommodations, family commitments, and community involvement. In order for this group of males to connect with others within the community college setting to attain the desired positive effect on persistence, they need to work fewer hours and be less isolated in their community work and family commitments. While this appears to be an impossible situation, it actually presents an opportunity for institutions. Since having jobs and interacting with like-minded individuals promotes the community that the African American males already are choosing to establish outside of the college environment, the opportunity for institutions to create networking opportunities with businesses and organizations that allows the students to work together, to accomplish class projects together, to serve as mentors together, and to secure family support services can be achieved through purposefully considered programs that integrate academic, personal, social, and financial needs of the students. This integrated approach should increase persistence for this underrepresented student population in the community college. Unfortunately, the students currently are struggling to create this bridge on their own, with limited resources and planning. The institutions have the resources, the connections, the research, and the capacity to address the barrier of self-sufficiency if the

actual desire is to help African American males succeed by helping to empower them through authentic job opportunities, along with family and community involvement that allows the males to serve as role models for future generations, and networking opportunities that allow the students to have genuine pathways for academic, social, and financial self-sufficiency.

For another part of the African American male experience, the gender aspect of the experience merits careful evaluation. While the participants did not spend much time focusing on what was significantly different for them as it relates to African American males and females, Trey presented several compelling points that distinguish the African American male experience. He noted that since "sometimes women tend to socialize among each other" and that "the typical Caucasian female may not be so open to talk to you [because of your being an African American male]." Trey noted that, because the African American males "are not quite the [Caucasian female's peers]," the African American male experience lacks the familiar factor that is needed to feel fully connected to the community college experience. Trey also explained that he felt that females and males were provided different expectations in regard to achievement, expectations that negatively impact community college experiences for males while positively affecting females. His claim was, "We [African American males] *have not* been taught that the bare minimum is to get an education. So when it comes down to the guy that's working, he thinks, 'Hey I'm working hard, I'm busting my back. That's good enough ….'" In comparison, for the females, Trey pointed out, "Nobody patted them on the back when they came in with all A's, because *it was expected* because girls are smart." This interesting contrast between the males and females stood out for the study in that some of

the current research questions (Alexander, 2004; Edwards & Kain, 2005; Gregg, 1989; Malveaux, 2002) why African American females persist at a better rate. And Trey's statement serves as a way of entering this conversation to suggest that African American males are often viewed as being part of the community, not essential, while the African American females are often viewed as vital to the family since they often provide the stability of rarely abandoning the children or the family and the community as a whole. Trey, interestingly, raises his children and is a single parent, so he contradicts the very stereotype for both father and African American male that his statement provides. He has been the stable parent for his children, and his stance to survive, succeed, and mentor others is a statement that positions him as an authority on the difficulties that African American males must overcome to persist in a community college.

The stereotyped gender role for African American males is one of instability, not one of permanence—whether it be as a father, spouse, or a community member. Neither the research nor the media provides significant evidence that African American males are consistently part of the family or positive parts of the community. While Trey provides an excellent model to dispel the myth that African American males are not stable father figures, Gordon and Fred provide additional strong examples of giving back to the community as role models and for being the male representatives for academic success within their families. Gordon strives to share what he has learned with his community so that those who are younger than he can see possibilities outside of their communities, along with his giving back to the community from which he comes. He had a strong commitment to help students connect with their cultural roots, along with bringing in prominent black males, along with sponsoring events and volunteering in the

communities that consisted of more African American people. Fred, on the other hand, felt compelled to live up to the expectations of passing on a good family name, something that only he can do as the male heir. His sense of responsibility has been to do well in school, persist to graduation, and eventually have a family. His persistence is tied to family responsibility as a male, but also to family honor. In spite of the many financial setbacks that Fred has encountered, he continues to persist to earn his education and excel in his computer science work in both an academic and entrepreneurial way, serving as a role model for others in resilience and achievement.

A final consideration for the African American male community college experience is the "Amazed Gaze" that several of the participants explored as primarily a negative stereotype that has served as both a social and institutional form of microaggression—institutional and societal racism. When Gordon explains that his peers doubt his competency as a group member prior to working with him, he points to his being an African American male as the foundation for their doubts. Gordon also noted that instructors generally were shocked when they realized that he had interests in economics, in history, in reading novels. He never allowed this shock to drive him toward negative response; instead, Gordon chose to ignore the constant attacks of "amazement of his competency." When Trey considers the low expectations society has for males in being instrumental as fathers in the household, in being a permanent part of the community planning, he adamantly holds that society should reverse this limited view of expectations. Trey also struggled with how teachers, a reflection of society, congratulated him and others too early for his minimum performance in class discussions or submitted work. Trey argued that this too-early congratulation was a mere insult to his

potential as a learner. For Trey, the "Amazed Gaze" insulted his intelligence, his skills.

Even Jerome chimed in on this theme in stating that the art work that was praised by his

community college teachers reflected minimum standards from his own expectations, but

the art project resulted in high praise that seemed false to him.

Further, Fred, Craig, and Gordon best represented the issues of being the "sole

representative" of African American males when they appeared in a room or situation,

positioning their barrier as one that confined them to the specific expectations from peers,

staff, and teachers. These participants clearly voiced the disdain of being elevated—just

because they were present in a room or a discussion—as the single source of authority on

African American male thoughts and behaviors. Craig noted that he often responds in

such instances, "I'm not the typical black person. I'm me." And he challenges peers,

staff, and teachers to get to know him, not the stereotypical expectations they have for

people who are African American male. Fred and Gordon struggle with and have to

overcome the hurdles that peers and society place on them when they have to deal with

those who question if their speech or actions are "really black." These participants'

struggles beg the question of what single set of attributes define an African American

male to such a degree that you can expect to see it among every member of this group. In

considering the barriers, this is a significant challenge for the group in that the

stereotypes are so pervasive within society and institutions that the ideas of race and

gender become constant barriers that weigh them down socially, academically, and

psychologically, creating this significant and overwhelming "Amazed Gaze" when they

demonstrate competence that reflects creativity, intellect, and positive traits—attributes

not always associated with African American males.

Researcher Reflection of Findings

The findings that were not particularly surprising to me related to family involvement, teacher mentoring, and connection to school. The literature points to these items consistently (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Bush & Bush, 2010; Gallien & Peterson, 2005; Harper, 2009; Palmer & Young, 2009; Perrakis, 2008; Tinto, 1993) as factors that contribute to persistence among most students, including African American males.

When I consider family involvement, the findings clarify the need for African American males to have the support of family in ways that may not be initally apparent to family members. The ongoing encouragement by family members that acknowledges and respects the priorities for a long term goal that the African American males set remains critical as a persistence factor. Since so many barriers emerge, such as financial setbacks and stereotyping, the family support may manifest itself by family members encouraging students to continue in spite of the odds, by finding ways to remind the students of the long term impact of his goals, or simply reminding the student that his work, perseverance, and progress are admired. These examples of family support do not require academic background or financial means, although these items can certainly be helpful as forms of family involvement. I can recall, with my family, how brief conversations or cards served as constant reminders that my family supported my efforts. And those items, seemingly simple, were the thread in the fabric of persistence that I needed at different times to keep a positive commitment within the long and often difficult journey of completing a degree. I am certain that the students who are attempting to balance study with transportation, work, family, food, and a place to live are in need of some type of famly involvement.

I do wonder, when I talk to my students, how some of them are surviving. In my classes, I see some students who come to class and have walked to class—sometimes in the rain or snow or cold weather. My first reaction is often annoyance that they are late, but when I investigate further, I often discover that they have walked to school, have not had breakfast, and have had to take a sick child to someone's house (after calling a long list of people who could not or would not help them). These students need support before they can learn. And yes this does present the most pressing question of whether institutions of higher education should be involved with the students' personal issues, the social needs, the social services. With this question that must be addressed in some manner, I find that the students often are unaware of the available resources. Not only are they unaware of the resources available to them in the community or the city at large, but they are also unaware of the resources available to them at the college. And for my students, I may be their only source of encouragement and the only person who can point them to possible resources. With this in mind, I find my role as encourager and resource agent to be rather limited and essentially incomplete.

I can teach them, but I have few resources to help them solve the many problems they encounter, problems that will distract them as they attempt to learn. Their problems are real. They may never make it through my class due to not being able to resolve problems that are external to my course. Even when they have cars, they may be driving with no insurance, no cleared automobile title, no up-to-date license tag, or maybe not even an official driver license. And they may have warrants to appear in court due to tickets they hae received due to the very items I have listed. Addressing these problems, these distractions, requires money, time, advice, and a community. Yes, the family is the

firast community, but often these students are either estranged from their familes for a variety of reasons or their families simply have no idea how to help them. I understand the problems generally. The solution, however, is a constant challenge.

And the interesting aspect of this family involvement concern is that these problems have been carried over from elementary, middle, and high school. These are not new challenges. I must wonder why a society that realizes that students who are in need of government housing throughout high school and lack the proper family support while going through the elementary to high school age years are suddenly going to be equipped to handle the challenges they face in a community college—challenges that demand that they persist by being responsible enough to study on their own, purchase their books, turn in assignments on time, meet with instructors outside of class, and basically be independent and self-sufficient adults.

This realization of the social and institutional obstacles that are prevelant in the lives of the students brings me to my concerns related to teacher mentoring. Obviously, students need teachers. The one person who the students sees the most is the faculty member in the classroom. If teachers are not interested or aware of how to empower students, who will point the students in this direction? On one level I agree that this needs to happen, but I also find it to be an enormous burden, one that seems invisible to the institution because the work involved in being a role model and an advocate for the African American male student requires time that is not counted. And what does "counted" mean? It means that often administrators do not find value in the attempt to spend extra time investing in students who are often labeled as lost causes. It means that other faculty members give up on helping the students who you know need some outside-

of-class help. It means that you know that it would be impossible for every teacher to put in as much time or concern for the students, but your work must continue in spite of this realization. It means that the very students you are helping may not take advantage of your help, may not see your way of helping as beneficial, or may not even learn from you. Ultimately, teacher mentoring is a process, a choice, a philosophy that must look beyond the response of others.

Teacher mentoring for African American males requires having a basis of effective practice that captures what it means to help a population of students who have inherited centuries of social and institutional barriers that are unclear to them and even to you as an instructor. My role, as I have come to understand this unique space of helping in an area that is not fully defined by either the literature or by the oppressed student (Freire, 2002), requires establishing opportunities for informal and formal conversation, creating experiences that help students connect with others who are like them, and working to help them know who I am and who they are—connected by heritage, by race, by human experience. This connection is universal when expanded to the human experience, so I know that others from different races can take part in this mentoring process. I am not alone, even though the weight of the challenge often makes me feel alone or isolated. Just as the students need a community to connect to in their journey to persist in college, I am well aware that I need a community of mentors who stay connected to help in the work helping African American males persist through the community college.

This connection aspect of the work within the community college is at the heart of what will lead African American males to success at a community college. However, I

must question or ponder how this connection is going to happen unless the institution

finds a way to initiate the first step. When I think about how power works, I always

recognize that the person with the most power has to make the first step to make a change

in what is an already-established power structure—one that is likely perpetuated by the

the person or institution who has the power. The unclear part that leaves me with an

unsettled, sinking feeling is that the institutions tend to leave the solution to those who

have the least power, the least knowledge, the least resources, the least ability to make

change.

A committee or organization is formed of students, staff, or faculty, but they have

no actual authority to approve what needs to happen, in an ongoing manner, in order to

make institutional change. I am unsure how a group of African American male staff and

faculty who are underrepresented themselves within a predominantly white institution

can make institutional change. Both groups have to secure permission from upper

adminsistrative areas of the community college hierarchy in order to affect institutional

budget and practice that is actually reflective of the type of change that will break down

the institutional barriers. I am not sure if the students who have ideas about what they

would like to see happen to give themselves a sense of self-sufficiency are fully equipped

to consider their actual needs that will empower them to be inpendent academically,

socially, and financially. I am certain that both the student groups and the staff and

faculty group know what they would like, but I question if either group (due to neither

group having had the historical sense of priveledge) can function in isolation of upper

college administration by enacting an effective remedy to what ails the instituion without

having the full parternership of those who are the "priviledged" holders of decision

making within the institution. This is a tricky but essential ingredient in the change that must happen in order for students to connect with the institution.

The students must be valued in a manner that allows them to secure similar opportunities as those students who are not underrepresented, and this is when the challenge emerges. When a student is not underrepresented, the student's options are fully considered by the institution because this student represents the traditional student. When a student is underrepresented, the scenario or set of barriers he brings to the institution are often not considered and generally not understood. And, unfortunately, few people who know of or understand the African American male plight within a predominately white community college setting are asked to provide input on the institutonal decisions that may negatively affect the African American males. Even when involved in decisions, the suggestions of a single African American male does not represent the whole of African American male concerns for a community college.

The connection problem is much more serious and difficult to achieve than I had originally considered because it starts from the position of power within the institution, but it must be shaped by the students, staff and faculty who are going to be instrumental in creating the connection. A hands-off approach will not work by the institution. A pick-yourself-up-by-your-boot-straps approach will not work for an institution. The solution requires engagement from those who may be most uncomfortable in sharing their concerns with the students, staff and faculty: the upper administration. If the connection is not fully present from the top to the bottom, it will superficial and ineffective and touch few African American males. When I consider the magnitude of this need, I realize that the investment must be in time, honest attitude, and money. But

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the most important need is the honest attitude, the honest desire to take a risk that connecting to the students who have the greatest need will also yield the highest rewards for the institution—with the underrepresented students, the underrepresented staff and faculty, and ultimately even with the well-represented students, staff, and faculty.

Moving beyond what did not surprise me in the research, I also found several unexpected themes that emerged within the research. First, the theme I did not expect from the content analysis was such a high number of stereotype items that also fell under the category of institutional broad themes. While race is certainly a factor that African American males deal with on a daily basis, my impression of listening to the direct statements made by participants (along with their tones) implied that the affect of race was minimized. In retrospect, I can note that my tendency is to ignore or downplay the significance of the affects of race/racism when I encounter it. My tendency is to doubt its presence so that I do not overanalyze a situation for a problem that may not exist. Much of this stems from my concern to not be accused of seeing race in every decision. I recognize that race is not always a factor, but I also know that race is always present, even when oen attempts to make a decision or comment that is not influenced by race. Based on the number of instances participants brought up the subject within the context of their persistence or their comfort level in their college experiences, the theme definitely is pervasive in their college encounters.

When I listened to the overall tone of messages and conversations, my initial thoughts suggested to me that financing, time management, family support or background, and priorities were more likely candidates to emerge as critical factors in the participants' experiences that would lead them toward success. And the questions were

designed to elicit what strategies students used that helped them work toward success, so I did not expect the findings to also reveal so many of the clear barriers to their success. The stereotyping was the single most negative persistence barrier to the participants' college success, and they manage it in a variety of ways but have no way of changing some of the external realities that shape their experiences, thus the stereotyping points more to the institutionalized, systematic barriers to persistence that needs to be addressed on much broader scale than any of the participants can control. In one way, this is disturbing because it means that the frustration of control related to this subtype requires concerted, ongoing, institutional change that may not be acknowledged as valid from those who do not experience it, or the necessary responses to improve or eradicate the negative subtype of stereotyping may not be desired by some individuals at institutions because of not understanding how the experience is perpetuated.

Another unexpected finding relates to the comparison of items that were categorized by promoting and requiring persistence for the participants. The number that reflected the close gap between positive and negative experiences represented the fragile nature of college experiences for African American males. The students may experience positive influences for several semesters; however, if situations emerge with family support, community strife, institutional challenges, or personal obstacles, the college experience could easily tilt toward being more negative, even though the student may have several positive influences that are working toward his favor.

Also, the subtype of Self Sufficiency that emerged seemed to reflect a recurring theme of lack of control that the African American males experience in the pursuit of a college degree. While finances are listed the majority of the time as a problem for the

participants, the money merely represents what they lack on a deeper level: an inability to stay in a home when the rent cannot be paid, an inability to afford to repair a car when it breaks, an inability to afford the necessary books for a class, the inability to focus on learning because of having to work many hours in order to pay monthly bills, the inability to afford to pay for insurance for himself or his children because due to lmited or no income, and the list of "inability" items continue to mount up for students in way that money merely captures the problem on the surface, but the lack of control of quality of life is at the core of the African American male college experience, not the money. And this lack of control that this population of students experiences makes for a challenge on multiple levels when academics merely reflect another area in which no control of the learning environment seems evident.

Summary

This chapter has served two primary purposes. The first purpose was to provide a biographical description of each of the African American male student participants for the study. The second purpose of the chapter was to discuss the significant themes that emerged from the data analysis. As a result of interviews, email correspondence, and focus group discussions with six interview respondents, 372 items facing African American males were identified.

Of these, 139 items were related to a theme of **Institutional Factors**, 90 items were specifically related to a theme of **Family and Community Membership**, 75 items were related to a theme of **Personal Values and Goals**, and 68 items were related to a theme of **Managing College and Life**. The items were categorized by type and then subtype to establish general themes.

Then the 372 identified items were sorted by persistence type to identify the frequency of items that promote and develop persistence for African American male college success versus factor items that require persistence from African American males to overcome college-success barriers. To help focus on the specific barriers identified by the six interview participants, refer to Appendix I for a comprehensive list of the specific persistence factor items sorted by Type and Subtype.

After analyzing the interviews, the items that emerged as two most significant subtypes in creating persistence were Family Involvement and School Priority, with Teacher Mentoring and Community Membership emerging closely behind the two subtypes. Students who identified having a strong family and community support system were more likely to persist in college, along with students who had a clearly defined

understanding of how to connect their personal goals and values with their educational priorities. Having a close connection with teachers at the institutional level and having a strong sense of membership to a broader local community are two items that help foster persistence in this group of participants.

When analyzing the factors that require persistence to overcoming barriers, the item that emerged as the most significant subtype in creating barriers to persistence was Stereotyping, with Self Sufficiency emerging closely behind the subtype. Participants identified institutional forms of stereotyping as a common challenge to persistence that can be classified as racial microaggressions since it leads students to feelings of inadequacy, isolation, and demeaning self-images, based on everyday encounters that chip away at their college persistence. The Self Sufficiency item on the surface seems to be mainly financial, but an underlying message that participants identified was a desire to support themselves, such as with affording a place to stay, having adequate transportation, and having the necessary materials for class work—books, computers, supplies, class outings, or other items that enhance the educational experience.

An expanded discussion of the implications of these themes is available in Chapter Five. The participants' perspectives fill a gap in how institutions and communities can view the persistence builders and challenges for students who pursue higher education in a community college environment. A more detailed summary and implications of study results as well as implications and recommendations for future study will follow in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a summary of the study, implications, recommendations for future research, limitations, and the conclusion. While the summary of the research reiterates the purpose, methodology, and results, the overall objective of the study was to identify the key factors that promote persistence, along with identifying the barriers that require persistence to attain academic success. Implications for developing possible institutional, community, and family strategies and practices are discussed to respond to the perceived needs that African American males report as barriers to their completion of a community college education. Additionally, a discussion of implications for African American males for college persistence strategies and practices is provided.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine, describe, and analyze African American male persistence factors at a community college in the midwest of the United States. The study was a qualitative case study with six African American male participants. The purpose of the study was to identify persistence factors for African American males in attaining a college degree. By better understanding the concerns and issues of African American males, possible teaching strategies and institutional practices can be adopted to respond to the perceived needs that African American males report as barriers to their completion of a community college education.

After transcribing the interviews, I numbered each line of the interview transcripts and began the process of searching for themes using a general analytic strategy (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995) of identifying themes that emerged from theory available in literature

review searches, along with identifying the themes that the participants appeared to be more focused on identifying as significant. I also used observations of past experiences of classroom work, along with personal experiences as an African American male, to serve as potential identifiers of significant themes.

This content analysis is coupled with the Critical Pedagogy put forward by Paulo Freire (2002) that "unveiling that reality [of low persistence rates in higher education]" with a "co-intentional," partnered discussion and discovery opens the door for "committed involvement" with "the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation [from the barriers that they have lived and revealed]" (p. 69). The goal is for both students and educators to understand, name, and act on the barriers or challenges to college success for African American males in a liberating manner that opens pathways to education.

To understand the barriers of the participants, the following questions were used to review the interviews for the study:

Main Research Question

What factors do African American males identify that help them persist in completing a community college education?

Sub-Questions

What do African American males find to be barriers to persistence in the pursuit of higher education?

What do African American males say they have done for themselves to persist in the pursuit of higher education?

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What do African American males suggest that teachers do to help the African American males persist in the pursuit of higher education?

What do African American males suggest that institutions do to help African American males persist in the pursuit of higher education?

The brief descriptive portraits of the six participants and the associated data revealed 372 individual items facing African American males. Of these 372 items, 139 items were related to a broad theme of **Institutional Factors**, 90 items were specifically related to a broad theme of **Family and Community Membership**, 75 items were related to a broad theme of **Personal Values and Goals**, and 68 items were related to a broad theme of **Managing College and Life**.

For **Institutional** Types, African American male participants more frequently noted Stereotyping as requiring persistence to overcome barriers for college success, with Teacher Mentoring more frequently noted as promoting persistence toward college success. When considering the literature , microaggressions (Sue, 2010) tended to be a type of stereotyping that the participants encountered on a regular basis in their college experiences, and teacher mentoring has been a proven effective resource for improving student persistence (Johnson-Bailey, Cervero, & Baugh, 2004, 2004).

For the **Family and Community Membership** Type, African American male participants more frequently noted Family Involvement and Community Membership as promoting persistence toward college success. The review literature concurs that African American males tend to persist in greater numbers when a strong family and community support system are in place (Palmer & Young, 2009; Perrakis, 2008; Peters, 2007; Robertson & Mason, 2008; Ross, 1998; Wood, 2010; Wood & Turner, 2011). In

contrast, when considering the barriers to persistence, Family Involvement and Family Background were discussed as sometimes creating obstacles for participants as they were on their journeys for college success. In these instances, students had to learn how to balance the negative influences or lack of experience in navigating the college systems that their families had a common obstacle for first generation or minority students (Murphy & Hicks, 2006).

Most noteworthy, for the **Personal Values and Goals** Type, African American male student participants mentioned factors that promote persistence twice as often as they mentioned factors that require persistence to overcome obstacles, with African American male participants more frequently noting that having School as a Priority as promoting persistence toward college success. This focus on having school as a priority fits appropriately with Tinto's (1993) research in regard to intention and commitment.

For the **Managing College and Life** Type, African American male participants more frequently noted Self Sufficiency as requiring persistence to overcome barriers for college success, with Time Management and Having a Clear Definition of a Successful College Student more frequently noted as promoting persistence toward college success. Also, as it relates to Tinto's research in regard to students with intention and commitment are more likely to persist (Tinto, 1993), suggesting that those who have a clearer, realistic focus on this self-established definition as it relates to their view of their own success tend to have a stronger commitment to completing college. This self-assessment process, when pairing the Freire Emancipatory (2002) process with Tinto (1993), it is possible to address the persistence issue from intention and commitment. Once students know their weaknesses from a self assessment perpective, they can decide if their intentions and their

commitments are to continue in the educational process—now fully understanding if their definitions of success are going to lead them to a path of college persistence.

Implications and Recommendations

Three types of implications come out of this study. The primary type of implication informs African American males regarding the factors that promote persistence, along with identifying which factors are mentioned commonly as barriers to persistence. The next type of implication informs teaching strategies and institutional practices at community colleges, along with community and family strategies, while the final implication is for future research. This future research can inform educators and communities about the unique experiences of African American males at community colleges. Additionally, future research should promote the development of policy and program initiatives that can help to create a supportive and encouraging academic and social environment not only for African American males, but also for all college students.

Implications for African American Male Students

Initially, this section will address the main research question: "What factors do African American males identify that help them persist in completing a community college education?" The findings point to four factors most commonly identified as promoting persistence for the African American males in this study: Family Involvement, School as a Priority, Teacher Mentoring, and Community Membership. With these items in mind, students have a clear need to balance their persistence barriers and persistence promoters, developing more of the latter. And students need to be deliberate in identifying mentors, family support members, community support affiliations, and teacher connections within the institution. Additionally, students must recognize that

school is the priority in their lives. Having these four factors working in concert toward

persistence should yield the successful outcomes that African American male students

desire for their community college experiences.

In addressing challenges facing the participants, the next two research questions

are addressed:

- "What do African American males find to be barriers to persistence in the pursuit

  of higher education?"

- What do African American males say they have done for themselves to persist in

  the pursuit of higher education?

The findings for the study indicate that stereotyping and self-sufficiency emerge as the

most commonly mentioned barriers to persistence for these African American male

participants. With these findings in mind, students must make the difficult decisions to

distance themselves from negative influences from family, community, and school.

Additionally, students need to recognize a microaggression when it surfaces, counter it

with a positive persistence strategies, and minimize the impact of stereotyping that may

tarnish the college culture in which they desire to persist. Additionally, as it relates to

self-sufficiency, African American males will have to recognize that they will have to be

wise stewards of any resources made available to them that would give them a sense of

control of their needs. While financial resources may not be as readily available, the

other resources of family, community contacts and resources, institutional student

services, and personal management of time and money can be nurtured to its most

positive advantages. The challenge with self-sufficiency is that it is closely linked to

finances, but it is imperative that African American males operate not from short term

financial stability, but from a long term investment in a career and themselves that will lead to success beyond college life.

Also related to the stereotyping barrier for these males, the students must be prepared for the "Amazed Gaze" that may come from peers, staff, and faculty when the African American male demonstrates above-competent work or nonstereotypical behaviors. The African American male can recognize the "Amazed Gaze" as a type of microaggression that is institutional stereotyping or racism, regardless of whether the intent was to act in a racist manner. From an empowering perspective, the African American male now has an opportunity to shift the experience from one of oppression to one that can be a learning experience for both himself and the individual(s) that had the "Amazed Gaze." One suggested strategy is simply to state that minimum performance is not acceptable for oneself. Another strategy is identify specific items that need improvement within the specific situation, and base the criteria for determining this improvement on stated expectations that should apply to everyone. What this means for the African American male is that he must have a clearly defined understanding of what meets acceptable standards so that evaluation is both personal and external by a faculty member or group within the community college. This is not an extraordinary expectation, since all students should perform self-evalaution. However, since the "Amazed Gaze" is a concern that often emerges for African American males, he must be able to determine if praise is genuine.

Also, as a critical item in student persistence, students need to recognize how their self-assessed definition of success can be a factor in emancipating themselves from the barriers (Freire, 2002) they encounter in college. When students own the process of

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being agents in their success, not just recipients of education or interventions, the sense of control they give to themselves can help them have the intention and commitment that Tinto (1993) identified as essential for correctly labeling as student as retained or not for semester to semester purposes.

Implications for Teachers and Teaching Strategies

The next question that the study addressed relates to teaching strategies: "What do African American males suggest that teachers do to help the African American males persist in the pursuit of higher education?" It is important that faculty members design and implement effective classroom practices to address the various persistence aspects of the unique experiences of African American males. Each instructor must assess his or her curriculum and classroom practices to identify how the various persistence items are affected in the college experience for this group of students.

For the broad institutional type, teachers have a critical role in designing curriculum and classroom practices that address the most mentioned negative persistence subtype of stereotyping. Since many of the African American males deal solely with the institution based on the interaction with faculty members, stereotyping needs to be addressed in a variety of ways. For course work, instructors must be aware of the type of material brought into the classroom. Articles selected, movie selections, even the types of events covered as significant in the understanding of a concept can either present a diverse understanding of materials from a pluralistic lens or can give a singular lens that advances one cultural perspective of events or society in general to the detriment of other cultural viewpoints, thus marginalizing cultural or racial groups through curriculum content. While it is improbable that all viewpoints can be shared, instructors can go a

long way in equipping students who have experienced the onslaught of stereotyping in their lives by allowing the students to identify counter narratives (Doeke, Homer, & Nixon, 2003; Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, & Peters, 1996; Harper, 2009) to mainstream understanding of events or even to allow the students to explore alternate interpretations of events when appropriate. These explicit alternatives to traditional lesson planning allow instructors to become agents who help in the process of liberating (Freire, 2002) students from the obstacles that hamper persistence.

Although the previous examples seem most appropriate for liberal arts and text-based courses, the subjects that are known as science, math, and music also have an opportunity to address stereotyping of cultures by exposing students to examples of mathematicians, scientists, and musical composers that defy the stereotypes that society often has for often-marginalized groups, such as African American males. Just as with any subject, instructors should consider the diversity of students who enter a classroom and show the students examples that fit the cultures or racial demographics present within the community college setting (Gallien & Peterson, 2005; Hunter, 1999; Jones, 2000; Rovai, Gallien, & Stiff-Willliams, 2007). Even if the examples in the classroom do not focus on the diversity of people who have contributed to society and the resulting curriculum covered in the classroom, instructors can provide assignments that allow students to explore these diverse realities of lesson content that allow the curriculum to converge with the backgrounds of the students who are studying, allowing an opportunity for personal engagement with the learned material.

Certainly, another important practice for classroom teachers in regard to the stereotyping subtype is to make sure that the syllabus addresses respect for varied

cultures, races, and beliefs, along with making sure that classroom behavior that exhibits lack of respect is swiftly handled by applying consequences that deter actions that tend to create negative persistence patterns.

Classroom instructors, when designing curriculum, serve the needs of students in a variety of ways. Well-thought-out curriculum can include assignments and activities that help students address how to respond to negative influences for persistence, along with helping students think through and develop effective strategies to make choices that strengthen their persistence. This curriculum should also help students having them develop strategies to think through options, role play activities to address challenges they may face, or discuss effective ways of managing social concerns, academic challenges, or any of the circumstances that tend to surface during their college experiences.

The classroom instructor also has a unique opportunity to forge a genuine relationship with the students that includes listening when the student has a concern, giving helpful advice, and setting realistic expectations for student performance. The last item is one that is critical for a classroom instructor. For the African American male student, one who still encounters the burdens of race, stereotypes, and microaggressions that permeate institutional settings, an important role that a teacher performs is that of being an authority who identifies the standards of performance that are both achievable and authentic. The African American male needs the support from the instructor that enables him to meet the challenges of a college course, college thinking, and college standards. An instructor who lowers standards gives in to erroneous stereotypes that further reduce the students' persistence. Instructors must be careful to not praise a student for inferior work just because an attempt has been made (Brophy, 1981), but the

instructor must be careful to not allow stereotypes to unfold as an "Amazed Gaze" regarding the more-than-competent behaviors that African American males can produce. When expectations are set, and adequate support is provided, the African American male performs just as well as all students. This is not amazing. This is normal when good planning, good teaching, and good study converge. The instructor should search out what supports the student may need for college success. The instructor's role includes not only setting high standards, but also providing some suggestions for resources in the school or the community that would allow not only the African American male, but all students to persist (Cross, 2006; Lewis, 2010; Nelson, 2006; Palmer, et al., 2009; Riegle-Crumb & King, 2010; Yohannes-Reda, 2010). The challenges will always exist for African American males and all students, but instructors are the vehicle for maintaining the standards while offering students resources to achieve college success.

Additionally, moving beyond culturally relevant pedagogy (Taylor and Sobel, 2011) that is sensitive to the cultural needs of the students, the curriculum should include more active learning that does not fall under the traditional realm of lecture and sitting in chairs and taking notes. The participants identified a preference for hands-on learning, discussion, and other active learning strategies, such as cooperative and holistic learning (Gallien & Peterson, 2005; Hunter, 1999; Jones, 2000; Rovai, Gallien, & Stiff-Willliams, 2007) that was more engaging for them.

Implications for Institutional Practices and Policies

The next question that the study addressed relates to institutional practices: "What do African American males suggest that institutions do to help African American males persist in the pursuit of higher education?" For the institution, concerns that are more

global surface that address the general culture of the organization. And these concerns necessitate institutional assessment of and elimination of factors that reduce college persistence, but the assessment needs to consider the challenges by using the lens of equity—race, culture, gender, religion, etc. Institutions must review enrollments in specific courses to identify which demographics of student populations struggle the most in those courses; however, identification alone is inadequate without providing some alternative resources to those students in how to perform better and improve persistence in those courses. This response requires that institutions see their functions as more than just as providers of education for society members, but institutions must look at their work as equity agents for society.

Another way to envision this equity agency is to consider that community colleges are the beacon of hope for the future of the communities to which the colleges belong, the lifeblood for future generations of the communities. And if a specific demographic of students consistently fails, the community becomes like a body in which a part of it has lost blood circulation. Further expanding this metaphor suggests that such a loss of blood to any part of the body soon will result in harm to the body as a whole because the entire body is connected and a loss of circulation to one part will soon result in damage to the whole body. This is an argument that institutions need to understand as an equity issue because the effort is not just about African American males, but it is much larger.

On initial inspection, the issue appears to damage only one demographic of students, but educational critics point to the lower success rates of African American males as a societal form of a miner's canary (Guinier & Torres, 2002) warning. The

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miner's canary warning is a metaphorical comparison of African American males to the canary that is often used to sense toxic fumes in the coalmines. And the canaries die early from the poisonous effects of the fumes, providing an early warning signal to miners that fumes were in the caves and will kill all of them upon prolonged exposure—as the early death of the canary illustrates—if they do not leave the fume-filled caves.

The miner's canary in the institutions of higher education has been the African American male, and the continued gaps in achievement, the continued dearth of African American males in the higher education faculty, and the low persistence of African American males points to the toxic elements of the persistence challenges looming ahead for all groups in higher education (Alexander, 2004; Bailey, 2003; Gregg, 1989; Johnson-Bailey, Cervero, & Baugh, 2004; Malveaux, 2002; Malveaux, 2005; Palmer et al., 2010; Pope, 2006, p.210; Redden, 2009; Roach, 2001; Stein, 1996; Wilson, 2000; "Yes We Can," 2010). Failure to address the problem for the African American males will mean eventual persistence woes for other demographics of students that appear to be untouched by the invisible, toxic elements of negative persistence that currently plagues the African American male demographics.

Thus, an institutional response to the African American male situation is ultimately an institutional response for all students in that the looming problems of one population need to be addressed in order to make sure that the problems are identified, addressed, and resolved so that the poisonous results do not expand to the whole of student communities within colleges. This institutional understanding of the urgency in helping African American males suggests that the systematic group failure of African American males points to the eventual failure of other groups in education and society—

an issue that should alarm and concern all who experience any challenges in attaining educational success (Noguera, 2008, xxvii).

Of urgency, as an institution, strict policies that discourage stereotyping need to be adopted that indicate that behaviors or subtle messages that serve as microaggressions (Sue, 2010) against any marginalized group are not tolerated. Basically, the institution sets the tone for tolerance, and administration must uphold the values of zero tolerance related to unacceptable behavior throughout the institution. Microaggressions, according to Sue, Capodilupo, et al. (2007) maintain a power to harm because of the invalidating, demeaning, and insulting messages that become part of what is considered normal encounters within an institution. The harmful, unwelcoming environment becomes an institutional norm that can be identified by analyzing institutional demographics such as the lack of faculty representation of color in comparison to the student population population (Alexander & Moore, 2008; American Federation of Teachers, 2010; Strayhorn, 2008), along with the lack of administrative representation in the academic areas of faculty hiring when neither the committees or the hiring supervisors are people of color, the disproportianate number of people of color in student services rather than the academic areas, and the disproportionate representation of students of color in developmental education courses but not in honors programs or science and math majors.

From an institutional perspective, the signs reflect a problem, and a nonresponse may suggest to students that the institution considers students of color to be incapable of adequate performance in those area of academic work. Granted, many of the problems are inherited from prior educational experiences, but the higher educational community

must address the circumstance rather than allowing the situation to remain the same or worsen.

And institutions need to search out examples of what has worked in other higher educational areas rather than attempting to come up with solutions in a vacuum of a single organization of a community. Some answers are within the community, while other answers may be found across the nation of policies and strategies for retaining African American males. For retention that leads to persistence, Parker (1997) and Madison (1993) identify a crucial need to have an institutional leader, not just a common effort, since a specific leader can keep the focus centralized and not part of vast system that fails to connect the many moving parts that often surround the issues of persistence and retention of students, particularly students from marginalized groups. Interestingly, some colleges assign this task to their areas of developmental education, seeming to imply that students who are working at college level need less support.

The institutional leader should address concerns of varying groups of diverse students, including first-generation, developmental education, students with disabilities, nontraditional students, and students from language learning backgrounds, along with students who take courses either on campus or online. Retention and persistence takes on many forms, and vague or inappropriate placement of those who are charged to advocate for student persistence can make an institution ineffective, even if a goal has been set. The priority to make this goal come to fruition is to create a leadership structure that monitor, adjust, and implement institutional practices that actually help students eventually persist. Additionally, Tinto's (1993) significant point for all students is that education, not retention, must be the institutional focus for a strong, effective institutional

retention plan; staying in college and not persisting to graduation and eventual acquisition of a career that reflects strong skills that were learned through a proper education are the outcomes that retention of African American males purports to have.

While Tinto's work (1993) does not place special emphasis only on the retention of African American males, he does briefly address African American students. He includes suggestions for retention that match the needs from this research study in that he notes that retention improves when students create a connection to campus mentors, create adequate support for academic success, and placement of students as the primary concern of the institution. This, of course, is not enough since institutions continue to have problems when addressing the needs of African American students (Jones, 2001).

Based on the participant interviews, institutions could improve persistence by considering early recruiting and tutoring of students of color in elementary, middle, and high school. Sending more students and faculty of color would also be a suggestion to address having role models go to the various schools, also creating early connections for college for African American males and starting a mentoring process at an early stage of education. Perhaps this increased recruiting and tutoring by students and faculty of color could help counter some of the possible negative experiences some African American males may experience before entering a college setting.

Additionally, college administrators need to hire more faculty of color at the college level so that students see more people who look like them and have shared experiences. Not having a significant presence of African American males at an institution hinders recruiting and mentoring efforts since the logistics of partnering students with a limited number of faculty members would be both exhaustingly challenging to manage and not

equitably balanced for other faculty who do not provide mentoring and recruiting services merely based on race or gender.

Institutions need to hire more administrators of color in the academic areas, not just in student service areas. While it is helpful to have administrators at any level who are African American, the conversations and decisions that impact students often happen at administrative levels that do not include African Americans who hold administrative positions that allow for the stories, concerns, and perspectives to come forward within the academic side of decision making. Additionally, similar to the faculty, not having a significant presence of African American males at an institution within academic administrative areas hinders recruiting and mentoring efforts since the logistics of partnering students with a limited number of African American academic administrators would be both exhaustingly challenging to manage and not equitably balanced for other administrators who do not provide mentoring and recruiting services merely based on race or gender.

Faculty and staff should be trained on microaggressions, the subtle form of racism that manifests itself through the daily stereotypes that students experience. Once the conversations of microaggression become more visible for the institution, the possibility for addressing it as a problem become achievable. As long as microaggressive behavior remains hidden, ignored, un-discussed, and not acknowledged as an experience for African American males (and other marginalized groups), the climate will remain unchanged and the participant-revealed, major negative barrier will remain unacknowledged and suggest that the perceptions are invalidated at an institutional level.

To expose more faculty and staff in the persistence barriers of African American males, more of them should be included in retention and mentoring efforts (Kobrak, 1992) with African American males. This connection will allow for a social connection that will reveal the personal situations that the students encounter outside of the classroom, allowing for the personal connections that seemed more meaningful to the participants for this study.

Implications for Families and Communities

Although not directly identified within a specific question of the study, families and community members are an integral part of the lives of African American males. In some ways, families and local communities are the extended institution that students encounter on a daily basis, so many of the institutional implications apply, but some implications directly relate to family and community members. In considering the major finding that African American male participants more frequently noted Family Involvement and Community Membership as promoting persistence toward college success, family members and community members should strive to create strong connections with African American males to support their academic lives. The participants identified that conversations that expressed concern about their student progress, along with the encouragement and support of the students' choice to have college as a priority, as key ingredients to their persistence. This also suggests that family and community members should be cautious in not suggesting that they do not support a student's academic choices.

From the barriers to persistence aspect of family and community implications, sometimes the family and community members may not see how nonsupport looks. But

the participants identified heavy dependence by family and community for activities that distract from keeping school as a priority as one often overlooked obstacle, but the more obvious distractions would be negative influences that result in behaviors not condoned for physical health or legal living. Family and community members can dissuade association with African American males in the community that provide negative influences. Family and community members could also choose to admonish the negative behaviors so that those undesired behaviors are viewed as socially unacceptable and reaping no social gain within the community.

Recommendations for Future Research

Due to the Thematic Content Analysis process, I have identified a close connection between negative and positive influences to persistence, noting that the positive persistence items are mentioned more than barriers to persistence, but not much more. As such, there is a need for replication of the study to confirm the findings and potentially unearth additional themes, along with adding research that focuses on specific analysis of items, along with self-rating of the items that students identify as promoters or barriers to persistence. Ongoing research in this area could help lead to an instrument for creating a semester persistence ratio that could help students identify areas that are high and low exposure for college persistence.

Additional research needs to occur within the subtypes to identify if the subtypes are indeed relevant to larger populations of African American males at community colleges in more schools across the nation. Additionally, in regard to the subtypes, more research needs to be done to measure the perceived significance of any of the subtypes to college persistence.

Research needs to also be done in determining how students' self-assessment of their success in college points to the intention and commitment factors that Tinto (1993) identifies as paramount in correctly labeling students as retained or drop outs in the semester-by-semester retention process that leads to persistence toward college graduation.

A final recommendation is to examine the influence of elementary, middle, and high school experiences in reference to African American male success in college. Since teachers, counselors, and administrators provide support and recommendations for goals, along with influence the self-esteem and academic background of the students, a study of the perceptions of the impact of those grade levels should inform practices and strategies at those grade levels as it relates to eventual college persistence.

Limitations

Closely tied to future research are the limitations of the study. One of the primary limitations is that a qualitative study with six participants cannot be generalizable to all students or to all African American male students. To overcome this limitation, more research should occur with both qualitative and quantitative methodology. The qualitative methodology could help in identifying and understanding both emerging and existing themes, while quantitative methodology can serve to identify the degree to which the themes are affecting student persistence, along with identifying how pervasive the themes are within colleges across the nation.

Another limitation of the study relates to using content analysis as a way to summarize the data. Some may misread the numeric representations to conclude that items mentioned more have more merit, while other items that are mentioned fewer times

have less merit. The counts that emerge from the content analysis definitely speak to the pervasiveness of the themes in the conversation and general perceptions that the participants have, but the analysis may reveal more or less noteworthiness for an item based on the context and the declared evaluation of a participant.   To address this limitation, further research with African American males to rank persistence barriers and persistence builders needs to occur.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter presented a summary of the study, implications, recommendations for future research, limitations, and important conclusions drawn from the findings presented in Chapter IV. The summary chapter reiterates the purpose, methodology, and results, the overall objective of the study to identify the key factors that promote persistence, along with identifying the barriers that require persistence to attain academic success. Finally, implications for developing possible institutional, community, and family strategies and practices are discussed to respond to the perceived needs that African American males report as barriers to their completion of a community college education. The implications sections also included a brief discussion of strategies and practices for African American males regarding college persistence.

As an African American male, I find the results of the content analysis and the pervading messages provided by the participants to be strikingly discomforting from an institutional perspective, but most promising from the perspective of positive family and community influences, along with the strong appreciation for and contributions made by faculty and staff at colleges and in elementary through high school levels. The overwhelming aspect of race continues to surface, even though the conversation from the

participants appears to minimize its impact. This coping strategy to make lighter of what is a clear topic of regular conversation and concern speaks to the concern that race still matters and cannot be ignored in classrooms, in families, in communities, and certainly not within an institution of higher education.

In a time of being politically correct regarding volatile issues, I struggle with the realization that the only way to help a student, a faculty member, a staff member, a family member, a community advocate, a church member, and the institution of higher education is to tackle the issue of race. The subject is not one that many people want to embrace, but it will not disappear, and not addressing the subject of race (better labeled as stereotypes, microaggressions, and racism) dooms the future of African American males, of males, of females, of communities, and generations to come. The miner's canary example will not escape from the history of progress; the toxic fumes of racism, stereotyping, and microaggression are evident in the persistence patterns across the country for African American males. The question for institutions, communities, families, and those who are not African American males becomes, "Will you wait until the invisible, yet toxic, fumes that dampen the spirits of persistence for African American males moves toward you—in your world that is definitely tied to his world—before you act?"

Action must come from all sectors in order for the persistence problem to be solved. The problem is not just with African American males. The problems unresolved will touch all demographics of students. This is our common enemy! The weapon for defeat or the strategy for triumph lies in our common search for solutions that does not allow socially created differences from moving all of us toward common success. I look

to African American males to equip themselves by studying with passion, respecting the educators who demand greatness from them, and honoring their parents by doing better than past generations. I look to educators and communities to support education, to value the professionalism of teachers, and to instill a thirst for learning in students.

Finally, the following poem I have written, "The North Side is Still North," culminates this study to welcome researchers, scholars, and educators, along with family and community members, to understand the psyche of African American males, including the me as a researcher. This poem is not intended to criticize or to complain, but to provide an understanding of how some African American male students and professionals feel on the academic road of college persistence. This poem illuminates the soul of the struggles of college persistence as a recognized and ongoing struggle that must be addressed.

The most pressing words from the poem are "unspoken does not mean not present." This statement incorporates the researcher's thoughts regarding the overwhelming toll that racism through microaggressions has had on African American males and society. The lived experiences presented within this study speak to a need to act bravely, collectively, and unapologetically to tame the enemy of racism. I would prefer to say eradicate racism, but history and reality suggest that racism merely rests, but good people ultimately prevail. In conclusion, more African American males must find and tell their stories to properly compile a history book that tells of our educational system, our communities, our nation, and our world—truth without these stories is incomplete.

The North Side is Still North

For my supporters, my critics, my people, YES, I have traveled a long way from Jim Crow schools, restaurants—even barbers. The journey, a long, windy, rich, unforgettable one—such exception only achieved by the over-blessing of loving family and friends. The journey BECOMES a beacon not because of me and my travels, but because I YET I survive, endure, move onward in this space of mine—co-created and co-existing.

For sure, the costs of this journey have stacked high and weighed heavy on my soul. I have lost [and lose] myself in this journey. I find myself transformed in this journey—for my students, my colleagues, my friends, my church, my family, my Self.

"He is a college professor," I hear, "a Ph.D. bound, an African American, a black man." However, not even a college position, cum laude-level Ph.D. work, layered with being a black man in our racially torn society, is enough to transform me in the eyes of my frequently awe-struck students, colleagues, friends, church members, and family. To them, I still am a stranger, different, unknown, not understood, a question.

Ultimately, I am a black man—from the North Side—who educates at a college. The North side is STILL north.

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APPENDICES

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, September 30, 2008

IRB Application No ED08119

Proposal Title: Barriers to Retaining African American Males in Community Colleges

Reviewed and Expedited
Processed as:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved   Protocol Expires: 9/29/2009

Principal
Investigator(s):

Dewayne Dickens   Gretchen Schwarz
726 W. 20th St.   2444 Main Hall OSU Tulsa
Tulsa, OK 74107   Tulsa, OK 741060700

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.
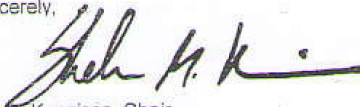
☑ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Sheila Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

Appendix B
First Interview Questions

1. Tell me about one of your best memories of school?
    a. What about your experience did you enjoy?
    b. How do you relate this experience to learning or college?
2. Tell me about one of your worst memories of school?
    a. What about your experience did you dislike?
    b. How do you relate this experience to learning or college?
3. Describe a successful college student.
4. Describe yourself as a student.
5. Tell me how you view pursuing a degree at a community college, just your general thinking of what it means for a person to pursue a degree at a community college.
    a. How do you fit into your picture of what it means to be a community college student?
    b. Are you acquainted with people who fit your picture of what it means to be a community college student? If so, tell me how you think they feel about their pursuing a degree.
6. How would you measure or describe your performance in school, specifically from elementary through high school?
    a. How did you feel about the activities and subjects you studied?
    b. How did you feel about the teachers in your schools then?
    c. What teachers stand out to you from your earlier years in school up to high school? What did they do that makes them stand out to you?
    d. How did teachers affect your desire to be in school as you became older and a student?
    e. What are some things teachers need to do to help students have a greater desire to attend school?
7. Do most of your friends encourage your academic pursuits? Do they encourage you in any area? If so what?
8. Tell me what you think your family and friends (would) think about your attending college?
    a. What experiences have your family members had with pursuing a college degree?
    b. What experiences have your friends had with pursuing a college degree?
9. What some of the experiences you recall with males who are in your life and have a college education? If you can't think of many African American males with degrees, why do you think this is so?
10. How do you decide what is important to you?
    a. How did you decide to choose to pursue (delay/or not pursue) a college degree?
    b. What would a college degree mean to you?
11. When you think of attending class each day, what are some factors that make you want to attend a class?
    a. What control do you have over these factors?
    b. What happens if the factors are not present?
12. When you think of attending class, what are some factors that discourage you from attending class?
    a. What control do you have over these factors?
    b. What happens if the discouraging factors are reduced or eliminated?
13. How do you define the teacher's role in the type of class that you would want to attend?
    a. What are some advantages of being in a teacher's class who encourages and you and inspires you to be present and to continue in a pursuit of higher education?
    b. What are some disadvantages of being in a teacher's class who encourages and you and inspires you to be present and to continue in a pursuit of higher education?
    c. What are some advantages of being in a teacher's class who neither encourages you nor inspires you to be present and to continue in a pursuit of higher education?
    d. What are some disadvantages of being in a teacher's class who neither encourages you nor inspires you to be present and to continue in a pursuit of higher education?
14. What advice would you offer to teachers to encourage African American males to pursue higher education?

Appendix C
Second Interview Questions (by email)

1. What are some of the most difficult obstacles to your continued enrollment in college? Why? What are you doing to try to overcome these obstacles?

2. What are some of the most important items needed for you to overcome the obstacles that make it difficult for you to study or continue in school for each semester? What are your options if these factors disappear?

3. How would you like to be remembered? As an athletic star? A brilliant student? Most popular? (Only choose one.) Why?

4. Would most African American males in college choose to join a subject club or a social club? (Only choose one.) What about you? Why?

5. From your experiences, what would you tell young African American males to do in order for them to be prepared to make it through college successfully?

6. From your experiences, what would you tell parents who are raising African American males to do to prepare their children for success in college?

7. From your experiences, what would you tell non-African American teachers of African American males to do to prepare the students for college success?

8. From your experiences, what would you tell African American teachers of African American males to do to prepare the students for college success?

9. If it were possible, what would you add to or change about your past to help you be better prepared for college success?

10. Where do you see your college education taking you?

Appendix D: Consent Form for Dissertation Research

Project Title: Barriers to Retaining African American Males in Community College

Investigator: Dewayne Dickens

Purpose:
- The purpose of this research is to gain insight into the barriers that African American males face in the completion of an associates' degree or certificate at a community college. Specifically, the study focuses on understanding the factors that discourage African American males to complete an associate's degree or certificate.
- You are being asked to participate in this study because you have been recommended by Imacity Community College faculty or staff or Imacity community leaders. They believe that your comments will be beneficial in this study related to identifying the self-perceived barriers African American males face in attempting to complete an associate's degree or certificate.
- The type of information sought is discussion of experiences and perceptions of those experiences through (1) interviews, (2) email responses, and (3) a group review of collected research data.

Procedures:
- Participants will be asked to provide (1) <u>responses to two interview sessions of one hour each</u> in my office or an agreed upon neutral location; (2) <u>email response of approximately one hour to a set of emailed questions</u>; and (3) <u>participate in one group debriefing session of approximately one hour</u> at Imacity Community College in which all participants within the study will be able to review and respond to the data results from the study.
- The topic areas of all questions will be questions related to understanding the participants' perceptions of the barriers that they have encountered as African American males in attaining an associate's degree/certificate. The intent in collecting the responses to the questions is to identify recurring themes.
- The interviews and group debriefing sessions will be audio taped for my transcribing purposes and verification of the accuracy of my notes.

Risks of Participation:
- There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits:
- Participants will be able to provide responses that can be used to help in eliminating barriers for other students in completing an associate's degree/certificate.
- Participants, as a result of discussing self-perceived barriers to their attaining a college degree/certificate, may be able to reach conclusions for themselves regarding how they can respond to and overcome the barriers they have identified

in their attaining an associate's degree/certificate.

Confidentiality:
As a researcher, I agree to meet the following conditions:
- I will audio tape our interview with your permission and transcribe the tape for the purpose of accuracy. I will give you a copy of the transcript so that you may see that I have captured your words correctly. At the end of the study, the tapes and transcripts will be erased or destroyed.
- The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.
- I will assign a fictitious name on the transcript or you may choose one yourself. Your real name will not be used at any point of information collection.

Compensation:
- At the end of the study, the researcher will provide a $40.00 gift card for full participation in the study. If the participant chooses partial participation in the study, the researcher will provide a $25.00 gift card to the participant.
- All gift cards will be provided to the participants after the collection of all participant data for the study.

Contacts:
- If you have any questions about the research study, you may contact Dewayne Dickens, DewayneOK@aol.com, 918-595-7046.
- If you have questions about the overall research study process, you may contact Dr. Gretchen Schwarz, the Committee Chair for this study, at ges1004@okstate.edu, 918-594-8468.
- If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Sue C. Jacobs, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-1676 or irb@okstate.edu.

Participant Rights:
- **As a participant** in this research, you are entitled to know the nature of my research. You are free to decline to participate, and you are free to stop the interview or withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation is voluntary. No penalty exists for withdrawing your participation. Feel free to ask any questions at any time about the nature of the research activity and the methods I am using. Your suggestions and concerns are important to me.
- **As a participant** in this research, your participation may be terminated if the researcher is unable to contact you in order to collect the data for the study.

Signatures:

I have read and fully understand the consent form.

Please indicate your willingness to participate in this research process by checking one of the following statements and providing your signature below.

The signatures below indicate an acknowledgment of the terms described above.

_____I wish to participate in the research described above, have read this consent form, and agree to
be audio taped.

_____I wish to participate in the research described above, have read this consent form, but I do not agree
to be audio taped.

_____I do not wish to participate in the research described above.

I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date

Appendix E

[Volunteers] Wanted for a Research Study

"Persistence for African American Males in Community Colleges"

The purpose of this research is to gain insight into the barriers that African American males face in the completion of an associates' degree or certificate at Imacity Community College.

Participant Description

     The student has either (a) been persisting in pursuit of degree or (b) the student

     has stopped persisting in pursuit of a college degree/certificate.

.**Participants Provide:**

     (1) responses to two interview sessions of approximately one hour each in my office or an agreed upon neutral location;

     (2) email response of approximately one hour to a set of emailed questions; and

     (3) participate in one group debriefing session of approximately one hour at Imacity Community College

Participants' Benefits:

     Participants will be able to provide responses that can be used to help in eliminating barriers for other students in completing an associate's degree/certificate

Additional Information:

- If you have any questions about the research study or would like to volunteer, you may contact Dewayne Dickens, DewayneOK@aol.com, 918-595-7046.

- If you have questions about the overall research study process, you may contact Dr. Gretchen Schwarz, the Committee Chair for this study, at ges1004@okstate.edu, 918-594-8468.

> Contact
> Dewayne Dickens to volunteer for
> the research study
> DewayneOK@aol.com

Appendix F

Letter to Possible Research Participants

Dear Research Participant:

I am working on a research study at Oklahoma State University related to identifying barriers for African American males in completing a community college degree. Thank you for agreeing (or considering to agree) to volunteer to help me in this research study. If you are willing to share some of your education experiences with me, I would definitely appreciate your time. Additionally, I also believe the research can be used to help this and other educational institutions to better understand the obstacles faced by African American males who are attempting to complete a degree/certificate.

Let me explain what may be most important to you regarding the research process: the amount of your time I am wanting. I am requesting that you share your expertise with me for

(1) an initial 60-minute interview, (Week #1)

(2) an email survey of approximately 60 minutes, (Week #2)

(3) a 60-minute follow up interview to previous questions, (during Weeks 3-8) and

 (4) a final 60-minute group interview with everyone I have interviewed to receive your group feedback on the group data results that have been shared with me. (Week #9)

The time frame should be over a two month period between the months of September and October, depending on the actual start date for the interviews.

This is total of approximately four hours of your time. With that in mind, I want to learn from you through three in-person interviews and one email survey in order to complete my research study. I am definitely interested in what you have to share with me.

More information about the study is provided on the other side of this letter.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation. If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at 918-595-7046.

Sincerely,

Dewayne Dickens, Doctoral Candidate

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Some Frequently Asked Questions about this Research Study

Q: **What is the study about? What kinds of questions will you be asking?**

A: The study concerns the variety of barriers African American males face as they attempt to complete a college degree or certificate. For example, I will ask about your experiences in the classroom or with some of the various student service areas (i.e., financial aid, advisement, and tutoring labs). I will also as you about experiences outside of college that have affected you positively and negatively in achieving your academic goals.

Q: **How will the study results be used? What will be done with my information?**

A: Your individual responses will be combined with the responses of others in this survey. Findings will shed light on how certain barriers seem to affect African American males more frequently in a way that blocks persistence.

Q: **Why should I take part in this project? Do I have to do this?**

A: Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. You, however, represent many African American males that have experiences similar to yours, and you cannot be replaced. Your answers and opinions are very important to the success of this study, as you represent others who share your educational experiences and opinions.

Q: **Will my answers to the study be kept confidential?**

A: Yes. Your answers will not be revealed to anyone but the researchers for this study in a way that retains your anonymity, to the extent provided by law. Even the other researchers will not know your name or identity.

Q: **How long will the interviews last?**

A: Each Interview (the initial, the follow up, and group ones) will last approximately one hour each, depending on your responses.

Q: **How much time will the email response survey take?**

A: We will have one email response survey for the study. I anticipate that the email survey will take approximately 45-60 minutes, depending on your responses.

Q: **Who is sponsoring the research?**

A: Oklahoma State University is the sponsoring institution for this doctoral dissertation project.
- If you have questions about the overall research study process, you may contact Dr. Gretchen Schwarz, the Committee Chair for this study, at ges1004@okstate.edu, 918-594-8468.
- If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Sue C. Jacobs, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-1676 or irb@okstate.edu

Letter to Community Leaders to Distribute Flyers

October XX, 2008

Dear Community Leader:

I need your assistance in a dissertation project I am working on regarding the barriers that African American males face in completing a community college degree/certificate program.

I am certain you have met and are aware of African American males who are or have attempted to navigate successfully through the college system, some successfully continuing and others delaying their enrollment for at least a semester.

I would appreciate your providing some of the African American males you know that may fit within the below categories :

> (4) The student has either (a) been persisting in pursuit of degree or (b) the student has stopped persisting in pursuit of degree;

> Additionally,

> (5) The student is willing to communicate by email; and

> (6) The student is willing to participate in 3 in-person, one hour interviews.

> If available, I will appreciate your providing me with contact information for the student. I will contact them based on your recommendation.

Additionally, if you have a location (such as a bulletin board or window for notices) where I can post the attached flyer in your facility, please allow me to post one of my flyers so that the potential participants will be able read about and volunteer for the study.

Many thanks,

Dewayne Dickens, OSU Doctoral Candidate

DewayneOK@aol.com

918-595-7046

Appendix H

Imacity Community College

African American Male Student Quick Facts

- Fall 2008 African American male, first-time freshmen student cohort = 109 students.
- Average age for African American male, first-time freshmen student cohort = 21 years.
- Age range for African American male, first-time freshmen student cohort = 16 to 54 years with 5 concurrently enrolled high school students.
- Average FAFSA Expected Family Contribution = $3,813 (Range = $0 - $99,998).
- Percent of this cohort who are First Generation college students, defined as neither parent has any college credit, is 46% (excludes missing cases).

Measure	Math Placement		English Placement		Reading Placement	
	African American Male First-time Freshmen	All ICC First-time Freshmen	African American Male First-time Freshmen	All ICC First-time Freshmen	African American Male First-time Freshmen	All ICC First-time Freshmen
Scored 19 or higher on ACT Subtest	20%	25%	17%	34%	23%	40%
Tested at college level with placement testing	3%	8%	39%	49%	20%	31%
Total testing at college level	23%	33%	56%	83%	43%	71%
Tested 1 level below college level	0%	2%	12%	6%	19%	13%
Tested 2 levels below college	5%	7%	33%	11%	38%	16%

level						
Tested 3 levels below college level	72%	58%	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Total Cohort	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Note: columns may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- Average African American male, first-time freshmen Fall to Spring retention = 60%, compared to 74% overall college Fall to Spring retention.
- Average African American male, first-time freshmen Fall to Fall retention = 36%, compared to 50% overall college Fall to Fall retention.
- African American male, first-time freshmen persistence after three years, including graduation, is 16%. Overall college first-time freshmen persistence after three years (graduation or retention) = 36%.

Attachment I: Persistence Factors by Type and Subtype: Six Interview Participants

[Note: R = "Requires" persistence to overcome barrier; P = "Promotes" resiliency for college success]

I			Institutional Persistence Factor Types (139 factors)	
	A.		Stereotyping (49 factors)	
		1	Being the "double minority," you can use it to you advantage if it's not being used against you. You find yourself using it to your advantage in most cases	R
		2	Because fairly bright, often overlooked	R
		3	Amazed that I didn't fit the stereotype	R
		4	Guilt by association	R
		5	They [some AA males with no passion to learn] know how to play the system, but they don't really want to learn anything. They might not pay attention in class, they might sleep	R
		6	Had more of a standard American dialect because of my education with broadcasting	R
		7	You might not want to deal with this clown today [who looks like you but is making you look bad]	R
		8	'Wow for an African American male he's got it together.' And I'm just the same as the other guy sitting next to me and I'm a man.	R
		9	My own stereotypes and feeling like they're in the background in one of my pictures. They're just props,	R
		10	Negative stereotypes: [Due to a] sense of responsibility to our people in general. It's a drive a factor that keeps me going.	R
		11	It drives me to continue.	R
		12	Would say never turn away, but it can be discouraging sometimes	R
		13	Oh you know that: Sometimes when I asked it [questions] they [instructors] would say	R
		14	We were singled out from the bad bunch and they would always tell us, 'Don't be like them don't do this don't do that or whatever.	R
		15	You can find ways around that from being like that; maybe going to different sources like going to another teacher that teaches the same subject.	R
		16	Worst memory I had to put up with this guy and he was somewhat of a racist prick	R
		17	I had moved to a new place I was usually the only black kid around and I was always the one that people would ask questions about and that frustrated me . I hated it	R
		18	I was the token black guy in the group wherever we went so I would get asked all the questions.	R
		19	I'm not the typical black person who is kind of gangster or can't really talk or thing like that	R
		20	In a fraternity and I was one of two black males in the house and for me to move into there, he and I had no association because I felt like he felt that I was moving in on his territory as far as him being the	R

			only black guy	
		21	He thought I was a sell out because of my actions and how I carried myself	R
		22	Peers They mostly see me as the token black guy most of the time	R
		23	I really don't worry much about the stereotypes. I just worry about mostly carrying myself how I want people to view me. I don't try to be that stereotype	R
		24	Frustrates me: When I meet new people and they ask questions and me having to be the spokesperson for all the black people in the world	R
		25	I force them to get to know me. Instead of them thinking, 'Hey there's a black guy and I should get to know him	R
		26	There seems to be certain expectations from some people to being a black male and what's expected its just kind of like a stereotyping	R
		27	Some people see it and expect too much	R
		28	People sometimes that overcompensate for how smart I am but I just see myself as average	R
		29	Some teachers expect me to be more intelligent than I actually am as do some individuals	R
		30	Some of it stems from the media whenever the media wants to get away from some type of black stereotype of either the sport athlete or something then they'll have a character that's really smart and that just creates another stereotype. It's just kind of like vague and they put you into these groups	R
		31	If I don't fit into the stereotypes for black people they say you're not black and when asked or confronted they can never say what they think a black person should act like or be	R
		32	I don't like being called on based on my knowledge in an area because of my race or any background that's attached to that	R
		33	In the college setting it has been like 'Oh well here's a black person let's see what the black man thinks.'	R
		34	I see that has a big no no, as a taboo. It has been kind of a recurring problem prior to being in college being singled out particularly because of race.	R
		35	People not knowing or being ignorant of the culture of how to deal with people better that are from a different culture that they are.	R
		36	Growing up in high school it wasn't necessarily cool to have good grades, at least on the outside it was. I think on the inside nobody wants to fail, nobody just wants to do bad. A lot of times you get criticized especially being black. Sometimes people would say stuff like, 'You're white,' or just by the way you study, the way you talk, or the way you present yourselves or the way you care so much about school and being involved in clubs they just criticized all of that	R
		37	In groups I would be the only black, the rest would be white and a lot of the time, it just felt like, they – black males – didn't really	R

			value education didn't care about it or just thought that they could just get through life without having it or just didn't want to be seen doing homework or studying or just didn't care enough about it to do it	R
		38	I'm the only black guy in some other classes there is only one or two of us and so with the few that they see or that they have, I want to be able to be an example, to be a good example and show that I do care, just to set an example for us as a whole.	R
		39	Because there is this stereotype and I want to help break those boundaries and I think they like me and have a pretty good view and take on me.	R
		40	A lot of times people are surprised. A lot of times they would say, 'Man you're not the normal black person.'	R
		41	They'll say 'Man you're one of those black people that act white don't you.'	R
		42	They will have an assumption about me in their heads before actually meeting me, because I'm interested in a lot of things that I guess that teenagers aren't interested in. I watch the news, I'm interested in the economy, I'm interested in a lot of things that some teenagers might now be interested in	R
		43	Sometimes it can be a distraction. Sometimes I would speak up in class and see the expressions on people's face and they look either shocked or surprised and especially when we're talking about stuff that's going on right now or they'll kind of look like, 'You know that?' or 'you're interested in that?' or, 'you read that book?'	R
		44	Would seem like people are just afraid to ask me a questions or when we would break up into small groups they'll be like wondering, 'Should I work with him?' or just seem like they are kind of fumbled on their take on me and so that can also be a distraction	R
		45	Most of them [AA males at ICC] you can tell if they went to college or graduated by the way they act sometimes	R
		46	Some of them are professors or some of them that have dropped out work at McDonalds or somewhere like that	R
		47	Some African American students or a group of students in high school would just act crazy and be loud and I don't act like that	R
		48	They said that I didn't act like some of the African American males … walk around with sagging pants	R
		49	They think that I would disrupt class or start trouble or problem in the class with teachers or students … I know probably what some teachers think, but I don't worry about it. I just ignore it	R
	B.	Teacher Mentoring (26 factors)		
		1	Teachers helped him connect writing to reading comprehension	P
		2	Maturity link with teachers	P
		3	Connected socially with teachers, but not academically for what needed	R

		4	[Teachers never wanted us to give up on anything and we had much smaller classrooms]	P
		5	I can go see those degrees hanging up. It lets me know that it is possible	P
		6	Make sure that the African American male knows that you are pushing him, because he will want to fight for you as well as himself	P
		7	Good versus bad teachers: Good patient.	P
		8	Some of the teachers knew that [I wanted to read at high school level] and helped me out on that.	P
		9	Bad: single out some of the students, try and make this person look like they could do better than you, didn't take the time out to teach them	R
		10	Read at the high school level maybe because I wanted to be in high school so bad	P
		11	High school teacher. She was the one that really taught me how to read	P
		12	Elementary school teacher … She helped me with my reading also, as far as my writing and everything	P
		13	You don't get a lot of teachers that take time out of their own time to help their students and stuff like that.	P
		14	Interacting with faculty	P
		15	Try to talk with them one on one	P
		16	They would see me after class studying or working on homework, if I had questions and I see them around I would ask them	P
		17	The teacher, he and the auto body teacher they were best friends, so he would notice that I would come over so he would always let me help him do stuff.	P
		18	Always try to encourage them a lot and try to help them stay positive and focused	P
		19	Barriers: always try to encourage them a lot and try to help them stay positive and focused … afford some of my classes sometimes and supplies that I may need or dealing with family or dealing with something at home	P
		20	I develop relationships with my professors because I believe that that is important to my success in college, but that's about all of the relationships	P
		21	Middle school. I actually had a really good relationship with my teachers. … my dad was real sick … they understood that and they even talked to me about that and had a conversation with me about I, so I guess just the fact that I had a relationship with them and I respected them more. .. I wanted to make them proud as well as myself proud. …f giving me advice for the future, for high school and life in general.	P
		22	Teachers should not to put too much pressure on them or condemn them or criticize them so much, but just to meet them half way and try to	P

		23	I don't know if relationship is the right word, but just to set a good example. Some teachers just run through the course work like they did it and time to leave, but just to be able to explain it to them and make it more interesting, that's one thing I want teachers to be is more interested in their subject and not make it look like its work	P
		24	Just something to help kids be encouraged. When they teach subjects, let it someone connect with another subject	P
		25	Talk about careers that you can go forth in from this class, in case they are interested in seeing what career they can get into from this material. That will sort of help them stay on track and stay focus and give them a goal that they can reach to.	P
		26	My freshman year. That year was a bad year for me, because the transition from middle school to high school … I was having problems trying to keep my grades up the first semester and then I had a talk with some of my teachers and they told me to just work harder because they saw me working… if I didn't get finished with my work I wouldn't turn it in. they saw me doing my work, but not turn it in. so they said I should just turn in what I had and get credit for that.	R
	C.	**Teacher Style (14 factors)**		
		1	Teacher instructing not adequate for my learning	R
		2	Good teachers stood out to me because they were passionate about what they were doing and would try a new method	P
		3	Teacher sort of scarred me for a while …. Monkeys use their left hands … would beat my hand to make me write with my right hand	R
		4	Because I'm like a visual person in terms of hands on and seeing it done at the same time.	R
		5	Those who wouldn't go to for advice: Their attitude towards other people, how open they are to different things, how they come at me with different things, how they respond to people who ask them questions who put them in different situations	R
		6	Those who are hypocrites. Those who like to take over the situation and not hear what other people have to say… those that don't listen	R
		7	Better for me to talk to another person about situations, rather than just reading and how I learn is…	P
		8	I have to do that physical thing myself in order for me to learn.	P
		9	In college there's less group interaction with assignments. Maybe, only in recent courses I've taken that I've actually had some group interaction	P
		10	I don't enjoy being in the spotlight	R
		11	Teachers were real good. I liked the way they just teach the class. They are really opened minded. If I have questions they don't just shut me down, they really let me ask questions and so I think I fit in pretty well.	P
		12	I like to be in the classroom with the teacher and students. I like that environment. I like class discussions, because I like to talk.	P

		13	For me to be able to understand things I have to be able to know bit by bit by bit to see how it happens. I need to get it broken down and that's just another reason for going to class.	P
		14	I changed teachers. The first teacher I had was a hard class. {And the other one was…} it was a little bit easier	R
D.	**Familiar Factor (14 factors)**			
		1	AASA: familiar factor that other students look like you and may have the same issues	P
		2	Familiarity thing	P
		3	May need academic help from your peers and it's just not quite there familiar factor	R
		4	AASA helped me beware of some of the things that African Americans are trying to do around the country and even within the community	P
		5	Showing proof [that things get better due to education] … people showing you examples that I didn't take the most perfect path but I got it. My brother is an example I keep coming back to because he shows my cousins he shows the people in the neighborhood	P
		6	A 50 year old Caucasian woman is not your peer and that's who you're in class with	R
		7	I have a very small social circle. It's larger now, but I have few friends here	P
		8	Those that are just like me that I go to work with, and it makes me want to fight for them.	P
		9	I have no African American males that are pursuing degrees that are friends of mine.	R
		10	Some kids might work harder for an African American teacher.	P
		11	AA males with degrees: I haven't met any … wouldn't even know where to begin to meet people like that	P
		12	One of my classes I was the only black person there, everyone else was white. I felt like I wasn't getting the attention the other students were getting, and if I had a problem he would tell me … . If it was somebody else, he would go up to them and made sure that he understood what was going on by showing them step by step what to do… With me, he would just explain it. He wouldn't explain it to me hands-on like the other students.	R
		13	I've never had an African American as a teacher the only ones that I've dealt with in the education system where in the financial aid office	R
		14	I went to [several suburban and urban schools in the areas] and I never had a black teacher. Well there was my coach who taught us track, but he wasn't considered a teacher. He taught us fundamentals of track.	R
E.	**Suggestions for Institution (10 factors)**			
		1	When you recruit, it's very important to get into the high schools and to get them in now	P

		2	If you recruit in places where people are working hard enough	P
		3	Getting fliers and getting the stuff out to certain communities, so that's my thing on that.	P
		4	Asking questions … identifying what's going on and not describing as what's the problem, not looking out to fix someone's problem, but to look to help with their lifestyle	R
		5	Not to form a group that's here to fix some sort of broke segment of society, but to help individuals with who they are	P
		6	Try to get people into school by letting them know it's a simple process	P
		7	Meet them where they are at and try to get them in school, not like you're accusing them	P
		8	Was really really wanting to learn I was persistent in wanting to learn	P
		9	ICC: they look at me as just another student who wants to get an education	P
		10	I was trying to enroll in a class that was just taught at the South East campus; the history of Africa. I was also trying to enroll in an honors macroeconomics class that was only taught at West and not here. So classes should be more spread out. Every campus should offer the same class.	P
	F.	**Teacher Communication (8 factors)**		
		1	Sometimes communication and stuff was a big problem. A teacher really didn't have an office on campus that was a really big pet peeve of mine. Now that I know this I steer away from teachers that don't have offices on campus.	R
		2	They are either too busy or working on a project or something.	R
		3	[teachers] have offices and office hours on campus, phone numbers that they can be reached at… some students they don't find their stuff out till the first day of class and some of the teachers that I had they didn't have offices on campus and stuff which was crazy because if you were doing a project and had to go to the lab to do that project, that teacher might leave	P
		4	Talk with professor after class	P
		5	I normally would try and ask the teacher after class. I would usually save a question until after the class was over. If it is a smaller class then I'll actually ask whenever the class is in session. The teachers are more usually open to questions then. Usually if the class is big enough some of the questions I'll have, another student might ask.	P
		6	There's no communication or anything. I'll sit there and I'll ask is this everything I need. And they'll just say yes that's it. And I'll show up and there's something else that you need and that's has been very persistent it's happened every year. There hasn't been a smooth year for me. I guess I have to just make sure that I know the system already and turn in everything because otherwise they're not there to help you.	P

		7	As a smart student, because of how I act and how I ask questions if I have problem with assignments, if I need help I just ask them for help	P
		8	I talked to the teacher after class is out and she helped me with the problem.	P
	G.	**Congratulate early … [for] they are smart (5 factors)**		
		1	It became acceptable to get a lower grade sometimes	R
		2	We congratulate early. We tell people that they are smart. I ran across people that tell their children that they are geniuses in the first and second grade. That work is kind of easy, even for 1st and 2nd graders.	R
		3	We have been taught that the bare minimum is to get an education.	R
		4	The sense of urgency is not there because we have been patted on the back and told we are doing well, because we are not dead and we aren't killing.	R
		5	There were two pieces that I made. One I wasn't too much happy with, but they loved it … I didn't think that I put a whole lot of effort into it. I just didn't think that there was a lot that I put into it as far as being a really big project.	R
	H.	**AA Females versus Males (5 factors)**		
		1	I have several African American female friends that are pursuing their degrees	P
		2	She knows that with the degree, at the end of the day she has a skill, even if her husband passes away or anything like that, she has a skill and more than a skill, she has the degree to prove the skill.	P
		3	Attitude of complacency [versus female urgency]	R
		4	Some men were raised to survive as opposed to thrive, to just make it out the hood or just get a job, go day to day and survive	R
		5	Nobody patted them on the back when they came in with all As, because it was expected because girls are smart.	R
	I.	**Teach Him, Just the Same as Everyone Else (5 factors)**		
		1	He is a student. Teach him, just the same as everyone else	P
		2	We all have the same learning defects that everyone has	P
		3	Map out how it would fit into their life for them. Hold their hands on that level. Hand it to them on a platter on that level	P
		4	Grade them on the same level as anyone else, to be ethical.	P
		5	Good teacher really monitors all the students, as far as work ethics, attendance and grades. That's really what a good teacher would do… and Also interacting with the students especially those that don't speak up a lot.	P
	J.	**Teacher Discipline (3 factors)**		
		1	Liked a lot of discipline in my schooling	P
		2	Everything was pretty strict. You couldn't wear sandals, you couldn't were short sleeves, you couldn't wear shorts, you couldn't wear jewelry whatsoever as far as public schools you can wear… whatever	P

		3	My 1st through 5th grade teachers. They were always strict and made sure that I did my work. I had sloppy hand writing. They made me do it over again. Middle school – it was mostly my math teachers that wanted to help me get through school	P
II			**Family and Community Membership (90 factors)**	
	A.		**Family Involvement (38 factors)**	
		1	My dad was teaching me and he said he knew that I didn't want to take that up as a profession, but he wanted me to learn it anyway because there may come a time that computers may not be around, something might happen to where I might have to do carpenter work or whatever the case may be	P
		2	If it boiled down to it they would support	P
		3	Coming to college got a chance to see my sister-in-law and got a chance to meet some people who knew my cousin. They used to go to ICC	P
		4	My friends. A lot of instructors helped	P
		5	Some of the people you hang out with too	P
		6	So some try to encourage me to go on and finish up school to get my degree and try to pursue something better	P
		7	So they envied him being the way he was. He knew so much. They kind of looked down on him and looked down on us also.	R
		8	I don't get a chance to see them [his family] a lot	R
		9	One of the younger girls is already looking into going to college as soon as she graduates. One of the younger boys, he was at the vocational school for a while. He is thinking about going back, because he had dropped out of something.	R
		10	Elementary education was the most influential … helped build who I am today [including] my ideas about people and situations, how to handle myself, and how to look at myself	P
		11	I think my experiences with educated black men was in church and there were some men that I would go to for advice and there were some that I wouldn't	P
		12	Influenced you in pursuing education: mother's ex-husband I saw who he was and how he carried himself and I strived to be everything that he was not and that's what helps me get through the day … I don't want to be like that person or anything near that person, so I strive to be over and beyond	P
		13	Influenced more by African American women	P
		14	Family helped me financially, and asked me about my grades, but they were never near to help me with those grades. Friends are the people I look to most for help	P
		15	The friends I made helped me more than anything. … I'd have to say more females and not African American.	P
		16	Family responding to degree work: Are you in school? How are you doing in school?' and it's just a lot of questions that they ask … Are you still doing nursing? Are you going into accounting? What	P

			classes are you taking next semester?'	
		17	I told my mom, but she didn't believe me until other students started filing complaints but she's [the teacher] still working there	R
		18	Mostly the experience I've had with teachers like you or with family members. My brother has a bachelor's degree and my uncle has a master's degree and I have another uncle with a doctorate degree and most of the experiences were them telling me to stay in college and just keep with it no matter what	P
		19	Influenced most by . . . probably my brother and uncle.	P
		20	I have a friend that is going to be an English teacher at the high school level and I've gotten help from him like for papers if I need a grammar check or need something rephrased or say it in a different manner he'll help me with that sometimes.	P
		21	Some that are my age that I've met and some of them have been encouraging the older students or say something of that nature, but it's kind of the same thing I would get from any ethnicity or race that are around their age usually	P
		22	Some people in the family are ok with me if I did or didn't go to college just as long as I had a good job and have kids and take care of the kids. Because some of them are big on having kids	P
		23	Other family members say it's a big deal that I'm going to college and getting to go to college.	P
		24	I think it's pressure that's not really needed	R
		25	AA Males They give me a lot of advice. They keep telling me how they're aren't enough black doctors or people in the corporate world in terms of finance and economics, so they really encourage me and really help in terms of giving me a lot of advice. They kind of also tell me to be an example to pave the way for the younger students and younger black kids	P
		26	It's not really a cool thing in a lot of kids' minds. They would just watch TV, play video games and such they encourage me to just really… as I am pursuing my education to help to pave the way for the future kids and they also just talk to me about the challenges that they've had and what to expect or just to always keep focused and to not get off track.	R
		27	Influenced most by my mom, because ever since I was a kid she would always tell me that, 'There's something special about you.' She's always encouraged me. She never accepted a C, so whenever that happened I would get grounded or I just wouldn't be able to go out with friends or got to the movies until I got that Cup … I'm not average. I know I'm more than that so she's always kept me and helped me to stay focused. She's encouraged me she's given me advice. She's also helped me out if I asked about career, just giving me advice, in terms of what I should or if I should be in certain things or just really just helping to reach the max potential.	P
		28	Discussions with my mom because she is interested in many of the	P

			things I'm interested in and so I have discussion with her to get her opinion when I am writing papers, or I have a preview my paper, to see if I have any mistakes	P
		29	My family is definitely a huge support just knowing that they wouldn't want me to give up.	P
		30	They'd always encourage me and I would just feel horrible to let my mom down, she's been there for me all the way.	P
		31	A lot of black men, grew up without fathers and you know you want that fatherly figure in terms of goal setting or in terms of having someone to look up to or talk or someone to help you become a man. Moms can only do so much because they are women so I know that having that father figure would really help a lot. I know me personally even though my father passed when I was 13 I still had a good enough relationship with me to know what he would want me to do and what would make him proud and just to maintain that strive and so I was blessed enough to have a good enough relationships with him	R
		32	The home environment is where it begins, because if you can't really balance your home environment how are you going to do that in the real world and strive in school	R
		33	But I think it's a lot harder because women can't teach you to do everything that a man can teach you in terms of when you're going to have a family who's going to teach you how to be a good dad or a good husband, just to be able to run the household. I think women can do it, but there's a reason a man's placed there.	R
		34	People influenced most in pursuing education My family, my mom, dad, grandma, grandpa	P
		35	Most of my family that are in town will come and watch me and my friend will support me in what I do	P
		36	I know that I have people to help me and support me through college and be there if I ever have problems while I'm in college. I know I have people there to go and to talk to	P
		37	My parents didn't really want me working while in high school, because they wanted to make sure I kept my grades up ….	P
		38	They'll let me work during the summer, but not in the school year, so I never looked for a job in the school year	P
	B.	**Community Membership (27 factors)**		
		1	We had a whole lot of choices as far as what we could do. For a while I wanted to be a nurse, a fireman, a doctor and something else. Those were some of the options I chose	P
		2	I had a teacher who taught my father (and uncles and my brothers) in elementary; It was almost like a nostalgic factor	P
		3	All of them have a mind to do something positive for the community	P
		4	College cats looked down on us; but they lived on the other end of town	R
		5	one of the things that irritate me that the African American males	R

			with the degrees see [the other] African American males with the degrees	P
		6	I don't see them [guys with degrees] down there [in the black community], so there's kind of a thing where they are busy maintaining.	R
		7	You have a spot in that community. It's just a matter of you taking it.	P
		8	Find someone who is from the community that you're trying to specifically target that could probably go and talk to people in their community	P
		9	I've always been an art fan. I always drew a lot when I was little. I think I got that from my dad.	P
		10	For my computer classes – I've always been interested and fascinated with how they work and just different things that you can do with them	P
		11	Pretty social and everyone knew who I was	P
		12	A lot of relationships that I still have to this day	P
		13	Received some of the best education I was in the public system . . . I went to a Imacity public school and I saw the differences that went on from me going to [other surrounding school districts] and I didn't like that … Imacity Public School, you're are very limited … There is violence in all the schools, but I just felt better at [Other Schools that are suburban not urban]	R
		14	I really don't see myself as fitting in. I see myself as surviving. I go to class. I leave campus. I go to class. I leave campus. I don't really develop the relationships	R
		15	If involved with more at ICC: I think I would enjoy it more. I think that I would develop relationships more	P
		16	I consider myself lucky to be in the surroundings that I am in that pushed me to go to college, rather that someone in South Central Detroit and they don't see an escape from that	P
		17	[majority of classes]I've been to with the community college has been with older students or students that I feel like are taking things I little bit more serious in their classes and behave in a manner that's suiting to their age and that feels like a better academic atmosphere for me	P
		18	I was at [a prominent magnet school]; I was in a program called the International Baccalaureate Program. It's like an AP program where we take a certain amount of advanced placement courses that can go towards college … not a program where it was real diverse. Only a certain number of kids signed up for it, because it is real challenging	P
		19	It [the IBP] was challenging and I did miss out on a lot of fun high school stuff, because I was busy with school work, I liked the challenge and I liked the feeling of being a part of something with other students who wanted to strive and go on and just challenge themselves more	P

		20	I want to get involved into more activities and ICC offers a lot of those. They have a lot of classes to choose from and I definitely try to take as much as I can without taking too many.	P
		21	I guess being in college really helped me to open my eyes more to the real world. Seeing how some people are just hugely affected by this, losing jobs, losing insurance and everything so I want to help and see if we can manage that better and just prevent this … do something to help pause it or just stop it	P
		22	I'm trying to get more involved in volunteering. Last year I volunteered at least two days a week to get do the higher esteem program it's a program to get my volunteer hours	P
		23	After school mentoring program for youth and I really liked … I like being a good example and a mentor with those kids. It's from 5th grade to 7th	P
		24	I don't want to see myself and other people succeed, knowing that I had peers and friends that could do just as well or even better give up.	R
		25	Whatever career I choose I know that I want to be able to give a lot back in the community and just help people to reach their potential. I know if I keep striving to be the best I can, in the long wrong I will be able to help them later on in life.	P
		26	Music is the thing that I'm really good at besides math but music is one of my main sharp points	P
		27	Somewhere I make friends with everybody and talk to teachers.	P
	C.		**Family Background (22 factors)**	
		1	Brother with GED and became successful; knew GED was not limiting	P
		2	religion and learning from my past, my mistakes, my parent's mistakes and my people and communities mistakes and trying to do better	P
		3	my brother who got an education and remained true to who he was that showed me the reality of it that once you get a degree	P
		4	I saw how much debt he was in and the same people that would have that elitist attitude towards us had the same debt as my brother	R
		5	My mother was important in that she recently decided to go back for her GED	P
		6	Both positive and negative examples of father and brother: didn't complete school bad, the role models good: the stigma that's on us that's on me, because it's on us that made me just say ok even at a young age I said that as an African American male I have to go to school	R
		7	– they don't have an academic education at all. They are still family, still friends … still play an important part in my life and that's pretty much what my social circle is especially as it's pertaining to African American males	P
		8	Mother dropped out of high school, but had Pharmacy the license;	P

			couldn't renew without a GED	P
		9	none of my family went to college. I'm the first to go to college and the first to graduate.[hopes to graduate]	R
		10	my mom's church. We went to school and church there. I went to school there till 9th grade.	P
		11	public schools it was like a whole different world. It was horrible kids were bad. Talking back to their teachers and throwing stuff. It was crazy because versus the private school our parents taught us respect and we gave our teachers respect and vice versa	R
		12	large group of black males. They were mostly much older, so they were I guess set in their ways	R
		13	Mother with degree, father no degree	P
		14	VoTech prepared me the best for my college experiences. It kind of helped direct me into what I wanted to do in college and also be prepared for what to expect in that field.	P
		15	Problems we had in high school… teachers didn't have text books to give us … one occasion, my algebra teacher, just didn't teach algebra … She would teach whatever was on her mind at the time … She lost the homework twice	R
		16	One of the reasons I ended up at ICC because when it came down to my deadlines and things like that for the four year colleges I wasn't told anything at the high schools and if I did get the information it was already too late they just talked about the testing and stuff	R
		17	Mother no college degree …maybe two semesters	R
		18	Dad tried one or two semesters … dropped out ad joined military	R
		19	More women, surprisingly. Yes, it's true. I have more women in my family that have gone to college and a lot of the women that have gone to college in our family are nurses and doctors or work in marketing … they work in real good professional careers	P
		20	Mother degree, father no	P
		21	My uncle and my grandparents and aunts, most of the people on my mom side of the family do, but none on my dad's side. [Except for my sister]	P
		22	Most of family with degrees: mother, father, sister, [grandmother, recalled from conversation], aunts, cousins, basically my whole family, yes	P
	D.	**Role in Family/Community (2 factors)**		
		1	I'm more like the get it done person	P
		2	The other uncles have no kids so I'm seen as the only one that will actually pass on the family name.	R
	E.	**Relatable Story (1 factor)**		
		1	If you have a relatable story– relate that story to them. Because, then they will know that they are not the first and that helps	P
III	**Personal Values and Goals Type (75 factors)**			
	A.	**School as a Priority (42 factors)**		
		1	Teacher told him everything comes second behind academics	P

		2	Learning the importance of academic deadline as well as you not showing up	P
		3	Shows up prepared, get prepared ahead of time	P
		4	Key objective; to come to school to learn	P
		5	[As a nontraditional student], education is 4th in my life, but when I step into that classroom or 30 minutes before and after, academics is number one	R
		6	I decide on what's important to me, based on my religion.	P
		7	Degree making a difference on a personal level	P
		8	If you want something to stay, then go to school. Staying power is just real really important to me.	P
		9	It's the goal system … you want something better for your life … That's the most driving and motivating factor … something better for my kids, better for me and wanting things better for us	P
		10	Laziness in general or embarrassment about feeling that you're not academically proficient. [what discourages?]	R
		11	Personal life over class study time: my personal life would consume it	R
		12	Set goals for yourself	P
		13	I just always knew that I wanted more	P
		14	Some of my classmates, 'Are you guys going to college?' they would say, "Uhm.. no.' I sort of wondered why they didn't. I asked why and some of the felt like they didn't need to.	R
		15	I was going to go into the Marine Corp. it was my first option that I thought I wanted to do, but then I was thinking I really didn't want to get into the army or anything. That would probably be a last resort. I would rather go to college and pursue a career in the computer field. That was one of my main goals	R
		16	Cut out a lot of bad habits (laughs). I would say this – not a lot of partying.	R
		17	Everyone was getting at me to come party, but I said no. school was priority	R
		18	Make sure that I was on top of things, make sure that my homework was done on time and studying like I was supposed to. College was my main goal	R
		19	Never giving up on my dreams for one and never giving up on my goals	P
		20	Martin Luther King Jr. burial site, 'This flame shall not be put out because it burns internally.'	P
		21	Choosing priorities: Is it going to benefit me in the long run, if it's not then it's basically a waste of time and effort to try. So I eliminate what's really not good for me at the time	P
		22	In the beginning stages of college I would've been a much better candidate or a successful college student. Later down the line, I started putting other things ahead of school,	R
		23	I'm just going to have to cut some stuff out to make myself	R

			successful and maybe more of the personal life needs to be cut out	
		24	Planning for bachelor's degree	P
		25	Four YR University: I don't feel like I fit in because the maturity level is very different there	P
		26	Prepared to go beyond a bachelor's degree	P
		27	It's sometimes a bit disheartening to see some of them struggle like they have to. Because they have kids and they don't have a college education. If they're trying to get the college education they have to take care of this first and this is your first priority	R
		28	Unless I'm good enough where I can start on a doctorate I'll probably get a doctorate.	P
		29	Past experiences help helped me to stay on track, because I've seen so many people even throughout high school just drop out and I think just staying focus	P
		30	Just knowing that studying and hard work is going to pay off in the long run. That's helped me a lot in terms of my social skills, if I want to go hang out with friend or just go with someone	P
		31	Just being disciplined and being focused that's what I've really kept that's carried me throughout this.	P
		32	think just having a degree here shows a lot of progress and a lot of work, because not a lot of people end up going to college and so just getting a degree in the community college is showing that they do want more than a high school degree, they do want to learn more, they do want to go more and have a higher position in the world … . It is showing initiative and progress and goals that they want to maintain for the future.	P
		33	Want to go on to a four year school. I'm just taking classes that… I'm on the ICC IU track where I take the recommended class my first two years	P
		34	Definitely want to go into the business law area and maybe even grad school	P
		35	Just looking ahead, knowing that I'm doing my best to get as many A's as possible just so I can end up getting a scholarship, because I know a lot of friends that are taking out so many loans and right now, I'm going to school for free because of Imacity Achieves	P
		36	I got to the point where I cared too much about my grades and my class work to care, so I raise my hand every time I don't understand something, especially in math class	P
		37	A couple of my classmates had to drop out after just a semester and didn't even try cause I had a class with them and I saw how they always acted, always late or never showed up, but I didn't try to judge them or criticize them but tried to show them another way out or another way to get the money or just to spend it better	P
		38	Frustrated seeing My peers just giving up basically or not trying to put forth the effort	R
		39	Couple of friends who would just move away or work full time	R

			instead of going through college especially since it's free for us for the Imacity Achieves.	P
		40	When I see a lot of potential in them, they don't see it in themselves or they've been stranded all their lives by an environment where an education isn't valued	R
		41	I plan on getting my doctorate in music	P
		42	Some people might work at McDonalds, but they are still in college to go further so they don't have to work there anymore	P
	B.	**Expectations/Goals Matching (21 factors)**		
		1	"I can now go on to college and go on to do other things"	P
		2	Degree opens doors	P
		3	My experience at ICC actually exceed my expectations	P
		4	You don't have a lot to choose from in Orangeplace, even people from Orangeplace they drive to Imacity	R
		5	I'll go to IU to finish up my nursing degree, so more college	P
		6	I would usually just do assignments by myself.	R
		7	better to have group interaction because most jobs will require you to interact with people	P
		8	Group think. The other kids that participated wouldn't have done it if the other kids did it.	R
		9	Some people will get into groups [for example] history classes	P
		10	I didn't know what to expect out of some of the courses and the classes that I was taking I had no idea what the work load would be like	R
		11	I was always told how important math was in my degree area but I didn't know to what extent I didn't know that I would have to take up to Calculus 3 for my associate degree. I wasn't expecting that.	R
		12	Probably somewhere around my sophomore and junior year. I would have pushed for a better math education and tried to take some of the advanced placement courses.	R
		13	In high school I learned how to do MLA formatting that when I took freshman comp the teacher was trying to explain what I already knew same for government class I had a better understanding of skills needed	P
		14	I took four years of Spanish and in my fourth year I think I got, on one of my tests, I got a D. I got real mad at myself. .. I was disappointed in myself for doing bad on that and I ended up just dropping the class. … got a C in the class, but I just expected better of myself.	P
		15	ICC has gotten me open to a lot of areas that I didn't think that I would be interested in. I took political science class and I love the class. I'm really interested in the constitution and the historical landmarks … keeping an open mind to many things and just doing your best in your classes no matter how boring	P
		16	Being in college I really started to open my mind and not be so closed minded and just thinking about things and write them down	P

			and I just became real interested as well as history I never thought about how much history repeats itself … just comparing and contrasting things, so I think that's what really helped with everything, keeping an open mind	
		17	It was actually more challenging than I thought it was going to be. The classes are just really interesting; I expected it to be kind of a lot like high school to be honest … It really isn't like high school. A lot of teachers don't grade off of assignment like in high school, they only grade off a test… I thought the teachers would be more lenient. You can turn in assignments late in high school, but that's also really not the case. I didn't expect it to be alive in terms of student activities… "real college atmosphere," so that's a little bit of what I didn't expect to see here.	P
		18	A couple of my classes are boring	R
		19	High school… the last year they were trying to get the seniors ready and prepared for college. Our work was a lot harder the [previous] year in high school. In English, our teacher made sure that we did stuff that we would do in college and treated us like we were in college. All our AP classes were like that.	P
		20	ICC a lot harder than it was in high school. A lot more homework than I had in high school and middle school.	R
		21	The teachers go through it faster than in high school. In high school the teachers would go through a whole class period trying to explain something to you, but in college it's just straight through it and they're done	P
	C.		**Without [the goal] I Could Not Breathe (11 factors)**	
		1	Every time I wake up in the morning. Every time I go to sleep. It's just like the air that I breathe. Without that I could not breathe.	P
		2	Being out for a while just made me want to go back to school more and more … It felt like something was missing. If I just stopped going to school period that would really eat me up	P
		3	It was not a drop out type of deal. I would just say a pause for the time being.	R
		4	Trigger for you, this desire to go back to school He exceeds their expectations. He knows his stuff, but he just doesn't have the degree for it.	R
		5	Trigger for you, this desire to go back to school some people wishing that they had gone to school, because it really does make a huge difference if you get your degree	P
		6	With a degree Hopefully, I could be my own boss if I wanted to. So I could choose to work for someone or just work for myself and have other people work for me.	P
		7	I always wanted more	P
		8	Graduating: big token or a big trophy or a badge of honor for me	P
		9	Want to go toward Master's degree …	P
		10	Because I really want to learn more than anything.	P

		11	If I were to just stop or give up at some point I wouldn't probably have any other plan as to what to do if I weren't able to actually go and work in the field. It's kind of like a dream job or something	P
	D.	**Sense of Urgency (1 factor)**		
		1	They weren't too psyched about it "sense of urgency"	P
IV	**Managing College and Life Type (68 factors)**			
	A.	**Self Sufficiency (27 factors)**		
		1	Knew I could "hustle myself through life"	P
		2	Worked, taking care of myself	P
		3	Already broke or already in debt, you don't want to add any more debt	R
		4	It won't be financial irresponsible of you to go to school	P
		5	Paying for my classes and basically making sure that they will fit my job schedule, making sure that I can work around school and everything. I was looking at going to classes at night time instead of the day, because I work during the day. Hopefully I can get some classes on the weekend also.	R
		6	I was thinking ahead of time, because I don't live with my parents	R
		7	Most of the time I provide for myself … I have to look out for myself, they don't buy my clothes, and my shoes	R
		8	That I was paying for this now so I treat it as a job	R
		9	I'm trying to pay for college, I have a job, I have a family I have to make time for work. I don't see myself putting time into an organizational activity in a community college right now. I don't see myself as having the time	R
		10	My big struggle has been financial aid.	R
		11	My teachers have been great, but my financial aid has calmed me down a lot. I dint have that worry in my head of what am I going to do if I can't pay for this or pay for that, my books, my classes… the financial aid office has helped me and taken the stress off me a lot so I can concentrate on school	P
		12	I would love to see on campus living.	P
		13	If they added on campus living I think it would be a lot easier for the people that are going to school	P
		14	I chose to go to a very expensive university which put me in my financial burden right now. So I think that had a gone to ICC like I should have first off I would be in a lot better situation than I am in right now.	R
		15	If you don't have that background of knowing what to do with your money, which I did not- I didn't learn that till later in life, like a year or two ago - that is going to be your downfall	R
		16	For me I went to this expensive university, so those Pell Grants didn't pay for all my college so I had to work and that put me in a struggle in trying to balance on time. I did well in the beginning, but later it put me in a struggle because I wasn't on an actual campus and I was doing a lot more things.	R

		17	Nutshell I don't think that enough African American males know what to do with money when they have, but as far as getting into college and having classes paid for I don't think is that big of an obstacle, because you have programs, you have loans	R
		18	Start thinking about your finances before you get into college, so you know how to use it	R
		19	Taking out loans is OK as long as they're subsidized. If you don't have those programs available to help you pay for college then you're going to have to get a job, but you need to know what you're getting yourself into before you get there as well as manage your time well	R
		20	Some of the difficulties can come from income because I remembered there was a semester where could have completely failed because of being on housing and losing a house. My first semester our landlord sold the house that we were living in so the new landlord, his son, wanted to live in the house. Whenever housing was trying to pay rent he wouldn't accept it so housing said that since he wouldn't accept it he could evict us	R
		21	During that move it was in midterms so I missed all my midterms so I ended up like failing some courses and I [would] lose financial aid because of that or be put on probation because of it.	R
		22	I'm the only son and I'm the only biological son of my mother and only son of my father so I get some things from his side of the family like they want me to succeed, but it's the money situation that has been hindering because the moving interrupts study time and interrupt a lot of things dealing with college	R
		23	I think the level of difficulty if it's going up on group basis would probably be around the same for other minority groups or other group of people that have low income. Because a smaller amount of people with low incomes will actually move on to college.	R
		24	I come from a background that is poor and there are some struggles sometimes but we have other family to rely on and help from government programs	R
		25	Sometimes it has been my fault and I get stuff in late in other time it's their fault because they don't tell me all I need to know	R
		26	I'll turn stuff in and I'll ask, 'Is this all I need?' and then I'll show up a week later like to financial aid and they'll say there's more stuff I need	R
		27	No Financial Aid; no books. Sometimes I've even had to borrow books. Sometimes it's even an older edition but it's pretty much the same thing.	R
	B.	**Time Management (14 factors)**		
		1	I have to weed out the things that aren't actually important at the time to keep me focused	P
		2	On a college campus, you are at college. You live on campus, you have your homework, you have your friends, and everything is there.	R

			When you have to deal with the off campus like here in Imacity you have your home, you have school, you have your parents' house, you have your friend's house, you have places that you want to go and I think that it makes it a little bit more difficult in managing your time in that sense	
		3	I go to class. I go to work. I go home, struggling for time.	R
		4	right now, it's work, work, work and rest	R
		5	to school, it was work, work, work, right after work go to class and be too tired to get through some type of classes in my last semester. That frustrated me the most.	R
		6	Successful students:] time management. I've seen a lot of students including myself that have had problems making the right choices in what they do on a daily basis.	P
		7	I haven't really mastered the time management part yet I'm still following up to make sure I work on that	R
		8	I probably spend around a good five hours or more whenever I'm not working doing school work, reading, writing papers	P
		9	I work like 32 hours a week, so it's 9 to 6 in the days when I'm not at school.	R
		10	and I try to come to the library to do homework so I only have a couple of hours before they close	P
		11	I bring my homework to work sometimes, so in my free time or on my lunch break I do my homework but that's not exactly where I want to do it at	P
		12	I can't study at home, just cause I like being somehow quiet or where I have a lot of material nearby if I need something and I work better alone	P
		13	I'll probably get a planner and used my schedule for work and write when I would need to take off so I could get time to study for my classes and go to class and do my work so I can pass.	P
		14	Apply for scholarships early and not wait too late like I did. I waited too late and my parents said that they weren't paying for me to go to IU.	P
	C.	**Having a Definition of a Successful Student (10 factors)**		
		1	Academics=Education; Social=Daily Routine	P
		2	successful college student: doing the degree that you love. Success – having all the tools needed to take you into the next level to live the rest of your life	P
		3	One who manages their time well, is making good grades, but I think the most important thing in college is to manage your time.	P
		4	Successful student knows, not exactly where they want to go, but they have to have a clear direction of just what path they want to go into. I mean just someone who is focused or if they get off track, they can just get back on track. Someone who's disciplined and they don't have to make the best grades, but as long as they put forth and do their best, be the overachiever, someone who is well rounded	P

		5	also be a good example and a good influence as well and not make it a bad thing to want to study or be interested in geography or history or any other subjects	P
		6	A successful person… one who wants to achieve something in life	P
		7	It's important to communicate with your teachers and stay on top of things.	P
		8	Making good grades, going to class on time, trying your best and doing your best, doing your work and getting it in on time and making sure that you study like you're supposed to	P
		9	hard worker, very determined, very persistent, very goal oriented and very articulate	P
		10	It is about knowing what you want when you get there and being aware of the task that's going to be at hand	P
	D.		**Task/Academic Precision/Skills (8 factors)**	
		1	Attendance and grading	P
		2	never had good enough focus to excel to potential	R
		3	just do it 100 percent; if you were going to hustle, be the best and do your best at it. Go all out at it.	P
		4	Photography class helped me mesh the creative side that I naturally have with academics"	P
		5	I drift off instead of listening to the whole problem	R
		6	taking notes, usually I like to rewrite my notes just so that I can get it in my mind or just go over it a lot. I learned a lot of critical thinking skills	P
		7	I thought I had a gotten a C on it and I ended up making an 84. It wasn't an A but for me, because I didn't understand and I pushed through it, I commended myself, because I didn't just shove it away or do it at the last minute or do enough to get a D and pass, so I think that it was one of my best works.	P
		8	I was just not prepared for the first semester last year, but the second semester was OK	R
	E.		**Balancing Academic and Personal (5 factors)**	
		1	Mastering both academic and personal challenges	R
		2	I wasn't fully prepared for if something socially goes wrong would I still be prepared to continue on academically	R
		3	I am working on now and to find a way to take my personal life and my school life and make them mingle very well	R
		4	Since I work, a lot of times I'm tired.	R
		5	Leave high school, get job, family responsibilities	R
	F.		**Financial Management (2 factors)**	
		1	How they saw how their other family members did. They saw them spend their money … What you see is what you do so having an environment where money is not valued or not really saved or spent right… they didn't grow up with money and they grew up in poverty and so the only time they saw money was when they were selling money on the street or they stole it	R

		2	Try to have a balance and a budget	R
	G.	**Resource Usage (2 factors)**		
		1	Take advantage of tutoring and going to the different learning centers	P
		2	If I don't get it in math class I can speak to the teacher, if she can't get it through to me I can go to the learning center and they exceed my expectation	P

VITA

Manuel Dewayne Dickens

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: BEYOND STATISTICS: AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE

PERSISTENCE IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Major Field: Curriculum and Social Foundations

Biographical: I was born February 10, 1966, to Manuel and Clara Dickens

Personal Data: Upon receiving my Ph.D. I will continue researching, publishing and presenting in areas of social and academic equity, including areas of African American male persistence, collaborative learning, technology in classroom, teacher professional education, and multicultural studies.

Education:
Completed the requirements for Bachelor of Arts in English (with a minor in Management) at Northeastern State University in May 2000.

Completed requirements for Master of Science in Curriculum and Instruction (with a concentration in English) at Oklahoma State University in May 2002.

Completed the requirements for the Doctorate in Education in Curriculum and Social Foundations at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2012.

Experience: I am an associate professor of developmental English at Tulsa Community College. At the college, I actively work with student organizations, learning assessment committees, and faculty professional development. Additionally, I am a co-facilitator of a teacher research group for the Oklahoma State University National Writing Project site.

Professional Memberships: National Council of Teachers of English, National Association of Developmental Education, Phi Delta Kappa, National for Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Name: Manuel Dewayne Dickens   Date of Degree: May, 2012

Institution: Oklahoma State University   Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: BEYOND STATISTICS: AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE
                  PERSISTENCE IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Pages in Study: 220   Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Curriculum and Social Foundations

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this qualitative case study that consists of six African American male participants is to examine, describe, and analyze African American male persistence factors at a community college in the midwest of the United States. The study uses qualitative content analysis as a research method that provides a systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena. This content analysis is coupled with the Critical Pedagogy put forward by Paulo Freire.

Findings and Conclusions: As a result of interviews, email correspondence, and focus group discussions with the six participants, 372 items facing African American males were identified. Of these, 139 items were related to a theme of institutional factors, 90 to family and community membership, 75 to personal values and goals, and 68 to managing college and life. The findings for the six participants shed new light on the context of what distinguishes the African American male experience from other college students in the areas of self-sufficiency beyond financial support; how African American males perceive their female counterparts as being raised with different sets of expectations that influence applicable behaviors in the community college setting; and how peer and institutional "amazed gazes" that serve as forms of social and institutional stereotyping and racism are part of the African American male daily experience. The findings for the study indicate that stereotyping and self-sufficiency emerge as the most commonly mentioned barriers to persistence, pointing to a need for multiple countering strategies to help these students persist beyond these obstacles. The findings point to four factors most commonly identified as promoting persistence: family involvement, school as a priority, teacher mentoring, and community membership. With these items in mind, students have a clear need to balance their persistence barriers and persistence promoters, developing more of the latter.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Pam Brown