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Defying the Stereotypes - Factors that Influence the Persistence of Black Males in the Community College

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DEFYING THE STEREOTYPES – FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE
PERSISTENCE OF BLACK MALES IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

By

Carol Anne Clinton

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
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DEFYING THE STEREOTYPES – FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE
PERSISTENCE OF BLACK MALES IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Defying the Stereotypes - Factors
that Influence the Persistence of
Black Males in the Community College

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and Carol-Anne Phekoo.
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Research on the success of Black male students in higher education at four-year institutions came to the forefront in the 1990s, but largely ignored Black males attending community colleges. In spite of their high rate of attendance at these two-year institutions, Black males were not persisting in numbers commensurate with their enrollment. Black males attending community colleges are often less academically, socially, and culturally prepared than their counterparts at four-year institutions. Yet, some do persist in spite of the barriers. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the factors that influence the persistence of this population. The setting for the study was one of the campuses of a large, urban, predominantly Hispanic two-year institution in Florida. The participants were Black males who had completed at least two semesters of community college.

Findings from the study suggest that familial, peer and institutional support are important to Black males before they start college and continue to be of significance once they are enrolled. Their interaction with faculty and their own fortitude also play a part in their success. The results from this study contribute to the extant literature on the

persistence of Black males attending community colleges. The findings can also serve to inform practice and policy in high schools and the community college system. They also have implications for policymakers at the state level.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

Community colleges provide the largest gateway to higher education in the United States with a large majority of high school graduates, most of them minorities, choosing to complete their postsecondary education at these institutions (American Association of Community Colleges (AACU), 2019; Bahr & Gross, 2016). Of these minority groups, the majority of Black males will choose to attend a community college (Ingram & Coaxum, 2018; Wood & Williams, 2013). They do so because of the community college's open access, affordability, and scheduling flexibility (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014; Wood & Ireland, 2014). Black men also attend these institutions with the belief that doing so will lead to their social and economic advancement (Wang, Winkle-Wagner, Sun, & Gaskew, 2018; Wood & Williams, 2013).

However, the reality differs from the expectation because the likelihood of their success, as measured by such determinants as persistence and completion, is low and decreases the longer they are enrolled. According to Wood and Williams (2013), the U.S. Department of Education reported in 2009 that 11.5% of Black male students will leave a community college within one year of enrollment, and the number of those who do not persist increases each subsequent year. When compared to other males, Black men have the lowest attainment, completion, and persistence rates in the community college setting (Wood & Ireland, 2014; Wood & Palmer, 2013).

Jordan and Rideaux (2018) explained that since 2008, 71% of Asians and 49% of Whites between the age of 25 and 34 have acquired an associate or higher degree

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compared to 30% of Blacks. Xiong and Wood (2018) noted that only 17% of Black men in community colleges complete their intended goal (whether the aim is to obtain a certificate, a degree, or to transfer to a four-year institution) within three years as compared to 27% of their White male peers. These attainment disparities have led to an increased focus on Black males attending these institutions because, as Palmer (2018) noted, community colleges are the "linchpin" (p. xii) to higher education for these students. In light of the pivotal role community colleges play in the higher education attainment of Black male students, Ingram and Coaxum (2018) called for "community colleges [to] be challenged like four-year institutions to improve educational outcomes and close the achievement gap between African-American males and other ethnic groups" (p. xiv).

The factors influencing the persistence of this population are complex (Dulabaum, 2016). Black men who attend community colleges are characteristically different from their counterparts who attend four-year institutions. Although some enter directly from high school, many are older because they have delayed entry to college, have families, and are independent (Wood & Williams, 2013). Many are also academically unprepared for college, having attended high schools without rigorous academic curricula or college preparation courses (Strayhorn, 2012; Wells, 2008-2009).

Community colleges play a crucial role in the education of Black males because they are often their last resort for a postsecondary education. Black males have a high dropout rate from high school which forces a large number of them to acquire GEDs (Jordan & Rideaux, 2018). This precludes their admissions to four-year institutions.

It was only in the late 1990s that higher education research expanded to include the persistence of Black men. However, much of this research was focused on Black men at four-year institutions despite the fact that statistics showed that most of these students began college at two-year institutions. This has resulted in limited research on Black men who attend community colleges (Harris & Wood, 2013; Ingram & Coaxum, 2018; Strayhorn, 2012b; Wood & Williams, 2013). Since Black male students in four-year institutions and those attending two-year institutions are so different from each other, information about one group was not always generalizable to the other (Wood & Williams, 2013). Furthermore, much of the research was from a "deficit" perspective, or what these students were lacking that led to their failure (Harper, 2010, 2012).

While many barriers to success exist for Black men in higher education, some students persist despite the odds (Harper, 2010, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the factors that influence the persistence of Black male students in the community college setting. While there is often some confusion between the term's persistence and retention, for the purpose of this study, persistence refers to a students' "desire and action" (Berger, Ramirez, & Lyons, 2012, p.12) to continue their postsecondary education from beginning to completion (Berger, Ramirez, & Lyons, 2012). Although the barriers to persistence were examined, this study also sought to capture why and how some Black men in the community college persist. An additional purpose was to add the lived experiences of these students to the extant literature, much of which has been based on the secondary analysis of data from national databases. As Strayhorn (2012b) noted, "secondary analyses are constrained by measurement choices made by previous researchers" (p. 371). In short, researchers using this data have to

tailor their measurements of variables to fit the available data. Addressing the achievement gaps in Black male collegians in the community college is vital for both their personal benefit and society in general. According to Strayhorn (2012b), Black men in their early 30s have a higher chance of being incarcerated than earning a bachelor's degree.

Empirical and Theoretical Literature

The predominant theoretical framework for viewing persistence is Vincent Tinto's Model of Student Departure (1975, 1987, 1993). Tinto theorized that the more students became integrated into the academic and social systems of an institution, the greater their commitment to the school. Such integration enabled students to persist and institutions to retain them (Wild & Ebbers, 2002; Wood & Williams, 2013). According to Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993), integration into their colleges resulted from the students' formal and informal interactions with the institution, its personnel, and their peers. Hence, Tinto's theory placed more emphasis on what happened to students in college than on the background traits they brought to the college. While Tinto's perspectives add to the understanding of student departure, his research focused primarily on White, traditional students at four-year institutions. Researchers studying the college experience of men of color felt the theory did not capture all the complexities of this population's problems (Harris & Wood, 2013). However, Strayhorn (2012b), asserted that credence should still be given to Tinto's theories because of its "predictive validity" (p. 361) on attrition research across varying institutional types, including two-year colleges.

Bean and Metzner's (1985) research on retention and persistence did account for nontraditional students. They argued that nontraditional students were more affected by

the external environmental factors in their lives than by the social integration factors that affected traditional students. These environmental factors included work, family, and finances (Wood & Williams, 2013). Although they addressed the nontraditional student, Bean and Metzner's research, like Tinto's, was based on four-year institutions.

Increasingly, there has been a call for new frameworks and perspectives to ascertain the various factors that shape student success for men of color in community colleges (Harris & Wood, 2013). Mason's 1998 study, "A Persistence Model for African American Male Urban Community College Students," merged theory and research focused specifically on Black men in the community college setting. One of his main findings was that the perceived guarantee of achieving educational goals led to increased persistence in this population (Mason, 1998; Harris & Wood, 2013). This ground-breaking work continues to inform empirical and scholarly work today.

Wood and Harris (as cited in Harris & Wood, 2013) are two emerging voices in the research on Black men in the community college. The two researchers conceptualized five domains for Black male student success in the community college: academic, environmental, institutional, social, and non-cognitive. Of the five domains, only the non-cognitive domain, which includes a sense of belonging and identity, was used in this study to add further credence to Strayhorn's (2012a) Sense of Belonging framework. Strayhorn's (2012a) work also linked Black males' persistence to feeling supported on campus and connected to the institution. Also included in the non-cognitive domain is the complex social construct of race, ethnicity and gender and how they influence persistence (Harris & Wood, 2013)

The intersectionality of race and gender in Black male collegians is well documented. Black males are socialized to believe that asking for assistance is equated with weakness; and this misconception follows them to college (Harris & Wood, 2013; Wood & Harris, 2017). Black men are often reluctant to seek help from faculty and student services personnel fearing it will perpetuate the stereotype that they are not smart. The reluctance also includes seeking help from mental health and disability services (Wood & Harris, 2017). Wood and Harris (2017) noted that according to the Community College Success Measure (CCSM) seeking help was the "second strongest predicator [of success] for Black men (p. 30). A vital part of this masculine construct is what Wood and Harris (2017) deemed the "breadwinner orientation" (p. 33). Men of color are often socialized to believe that providing for their families is the ultimate responsibility of the man. Since they tend to be older with dependents, community college males will often leave school to support their families (Wood, 2014; Wood & Harris, 2017).

One major student development theory was used to inform this study. Rendon's 1994 Validation Theory was one of the few early theories that addressed race and student development. Rendon (1994) noted that while traditional students did not voice concerns about their success, nontraditional students—those from diverse racial/ethnic and cultural backgrounds—frequently did (Rendon, 1994; Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). Rendon (1994) further explained that active intervention in the form of validation was needed to encourage these students to become more involved in campus life and enhance their self-esteem. She described validation as encouraging and supportive interactions between students and all college personnel both in and out of the classroom. She further

noted that validation positively affected students' development both academically and personally (Rendon, 1994; Patton, et al., 2016).

In addition, because this study explored factors that lead to the persistence of Black males, Harper's (2010, 2012) anti-deficit framework was also considered. This framework focuses on the factors that lead to Black male collegians' success, including their persistence. Harper (2010, 2012) attributed many of the barriers Black men face in college to systemic racism both on and off college campuses, and on the perpetuation of stereotypes about Black men often found in the media and research. How Black collegians are able to overcome barriers such as the lack of academic capital (the academic preparation necessary for college) and lack of sociocultural capital (the learned strategies of how to navigate college) (Wells, 2008-2009), were explored using Harper's (2010, 2012) anti-deficit framework. This framework presents the counterargument that Black men bring their own capital to college, helping them to be successful (Strayhorn, 2012b; Wells, 2008-2009). Wang, et al. (2018) explored the importance of educational aspiration, a form of capital not always mentioned in the research, to the success of minority students. Although some researchers found that educational aspiration waned overtime, Wang, et al.'s (2018) study on Black men enrolled in community colleges provided evidence to the contrary.

Finally, Bronfenbrenner's (1993) Theory of Developmental Ecology was also used as a framework for understanding the persistence of Black men in the community college. Bronfenbrenner (1993) posited that human development does not occur in isolation, but results from the interaction with the surrounding environments. As students differ, bringing varying attributes and characteristics with them to college, so do the

environments within which they interact both on and off campus. Bronfenbrenner (1993) classified these environs as either proximal (immediate), such as the college campus, or distal (broader), such as their home communities. This ecological approach theorized that human experiences occur within these multifaceted and interactive environments that impact their lives. He classified these environments as the microsystem, mesosytem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. It is the individual's interaction with these different environments that results in his or her development, both negatively and positively (Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Patton et al., 2016; Renn & Arnold, 2003).

The Current Study

This study was conducted at one of the campuses of a Hispanic-serving, two-year institution in Florida. As of 2017, Black non-Hispanic students made up 17% of the college's total enrollment and 18% of the population at the campus where the research was conducted. Sixty-eight percent of the students at the research site were Hispanic and 11% were White. Compared to the college's other campuses, the research site had the highest proportion of first-generation students; the highest proportion of students academically underprepared in reading, writing, and math; the second-highest proportion of students living below the poverty line; and the second-highest proportion of students with dependents (MASKED COLLEGE, MASKED campus data, 2017).

Often in the research literature, the terms Black and African-American are used interchangeably. The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) (2017) also does not make any distinction between the terms Black and African-American, categorizing Blacks or African-Americans as persons having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. Similar to the U.S. Department of Education, the college in this study identified this

student population only by race and without ethnic distinctions. Hence, "Black" was used in the current study as an all-encompassing term to refer to students of African descent. This does not negate the heterogeneity of Black male students at the college and in this study, who are representative of what Wood (2014) referred to as the "in-group diversity" (p. 617) of Black men. Wood's (2014) pointed to the literature that "suggests that black males are a diverse group representative of varying backgrounds, experiences, identities, dispositions, and culture" (p. 617).

The Black male population at the college and campus research site is diverse with students from various backgrounds and cultures. Some are African-American, as they and their parents were born in the United States; others were born in the United States to immigrant parents; and other students and their parents migrated to the United States. While all five participants in the study were born in the United States, two were the children of parents born in Haiti, and the other three were children of parents born in the United States. With this in-group diversity in the sample population, this study aimed to capture both the differences and similarities in the experiences of these students.

Because this study focused on the college persistence of Black males, it is important to note that persistence is a "student measure" while retention is an "institutional measure" (Hagedorn, 2012, p.85). However, it is often difficult to separate the two since what the institution does affects the student and vice versa. Although this study focused on the persistence of Black males in the community college, institutional factors were not excluded.

Rationale for the Study

Although research has increased on the factors affecting the persistence of Black men in higher education, much of it has been focused on four-year institutions. Research is scarce on the persistence and success of Black men in the community college (Strayhorn, 2012b; Wild & Ebbers, 2002). While commonalities exist in the two populations because of their race, differences such as age and academic readiness tend to separate Black males at four-year schools from those at two-year schools (Wood & Williams, 2013). The results of this study should, therefore, add to the evolving literature on the persistence of Black men in the community college. Furthermore, this study sought to provide a positive, anti-deficit perspective for understanding Black male student persistence as advocated by Harper's (2010, 2012, 2015) in his research on the Black male experience in college.

Finally, this study adds firsthand qualitative data to the more readily available secondary data used in previous research. According to Wang et al. (2018), an estimated 50% of the research on Black men who attend community colleges is based on statistical data. A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to explore the lived experiences of the participants through their own voices and study the phenomena in the natural environment (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013).

Research Questions

Two major research questions and one exploratory question guided this qualitative study. First, what were Black male students' perceptions of the factors that led them to pursue an education in a community college? Second, what were Black male students' perceptions of the factors that helped facilitate their persistence in a community

college? These two questions sought to ascertain the lived experiences (personal, familial, institutional, cultural, and societal) of Black males before and after attending college. Third, based on these lived experiences, what recommendations did these students have for their counterparts about succeeding at the community college?

Significance of the Study

Black men in the United States rely on higher education to change their socioeconomic status, especially those attending community colleges (Ingram, Williams, Coaxum, Hilton, & Harrell, 2016). The majority of Black men seeking a college education choose to do so at community colleges (Ingram & Coaxum, 2018; Strayhorn, 2012b; Wood & Ireland, 2014; Wood & Palmer, 2013; Wood & Williams, 2013; Xiong & Wood, 2018). For many, such institutions are their only option for upward mobility (Wang, et al., 2018; Wood & Williams, 2013).

However, according to Wood and Williams (2013), a 2009 U.S. Department of Education report noted that 11.5% of Black men will leave the community college without credentials within one year of enrollment, 48.9% after three years, and 83% after six years. The current study's findings can inform and influence community colleges and policymakers regarding ways and means to provide these students better support. Most importantly, without a better understanding of the complexities of the issues and efforts to alleviate them, the Black male's lack of success in college will continue to have grave consequences for these men personally and for society as a whole (Ingram et al., 2016; Strayhorn, 2012b).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is a dearth of research on Black men in higher education. While this deficiency was somewhat rectified starting in the late 1990s with a proliferation of research on Black men, researchers were primarily focused on this population in four-year institutions (Strayhorn, 2012b; Wild & Ebbers, 2002). However, Black men enroll in two-year institutions in higher numbers than any other racial or ethnic group (Ingram & Coaxum, 2018; Strayhorn, 2012b; Wood & Ireland, 2014; Wood & Palmer, 2013; Wood & Williams, 2013; Xiong & Wood, 2018) where their difficulty in persisting and completing is well recognized (Wood, 2014; Wood & Ireland, 2014; Wood & Palmer, 2013) yet little understood (Dulabaum, 2016). This chapter presents a historical background on Blacks in higher education, including the role of the community college, and research on persistence. It then presents the theoretical frameworks that underpin this qualitative study, followed by a review of the literature on Black males in higher education in general, and, more specifically, Black males at community colleges.

Historical Background

To contextualize the struggle of Blacks to achieve in higher education, it is important to consider their history in U.S. higher education. In the wake of the Civil War, states and localities passed Jim Crow laws that enforced racial segregation and perpetuated extreme disadvantages for Blacks at every level of society, including higher education (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). These laws continued until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which ushered in desegregation. However, by 1976, Black men made up only 4.3% of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions. Twenty-six years later, in 2002, the number remained the same (Harper, 2012). In addition, even after U.S.

schools and colleges were integrated and access to higher education increased for Blacks, they did not do as well as their peers on most measures of academic success (Wood & Ireland, 2014; Wood & Palmer, 2013). The reasons for this are complex (Dulabaum, 2016). They include personal factors such as the lack of academic preparation and a dearth of the social and cultural capital needed to navigate college (Strayhorn, 2012b; Wells, 2008-2009) as well institutional factors such as an unwelcoming campus climate and faculty (Harper 2012, 2015; Strayhorn, 2012a). The following sections offer additional details on the history of Blacks in higher education, particularly in relation to community colleges and their persistence.

The community college. Joliet Junior College, the oldest public two-year college in the United States, was established in 1901 to offer local high school graduates a rigorous two-year postsecondary education comparable to the first two years at a four-year university (Bahr & Gross, 2016; Crisp & Mina, 2012). While the mission of the community college has not changed, many would argue that its curriculum is no longer rigorous. The number of students and institutions has also grown exponentially. Increased enrollment triggered by the G.I. Bill in 1944 that helped pay college tuition for veterans and the 1950 Truman Commission Report that advocated higher education for all high school graduates, triggered the founding of hundreds of community colleges (Bahr & Gross, 2016; Peterson, 2007). This growth continued through the 1960s and 1970s, resulting in more than 1,000 community colleges with over 12 million students enrolled (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2016.)

A major challenge for the community college is the role most often assigned them, that of a "non-selective, low-cost college focused on meeting the diverse needs of

the local community in which it is located" (Bahr & Gross, 2016, p. 463). Their

accessibility and affordability have made community colleges the primary gateway to

higher education for students who are low-income, first-generation, underprepared, older,

and are underrepresented minorities. In 2014, 56% of Hispanic undergraduates were

enrolled in community colleges, 44% of Black students, and 39% of White students (Ma

& Baum, 2016). Black males have the highest enrollment rate in community colleges of

any minority group (Ingram & Coaxum, 2018; Strayhorn, 2012b; Wood & Ireland, 2014;

Wood & Palmer, 2013; Wood & Williams, 2013; Xiong & Wood, 2018).

However, in spite of their higher enrollment numbers, Black men have the lowest

completion rates (12%) when compared to Hispanic males (14.6%), Native American

males (18.7%), and White males (22%) (Digest of Education Statistics, 2012). Within

three years of entering community college, only 42.2 % of Black men had persisted or

attained a degree compared to 53.2% of White males, 55.65% of Hispanic males, and

76.7% of Asian American males (Wood & Palmer, 2013). Ironically, the more time a

Black male spends in a community college, the more likely he is to leave without a

degree, certificate, or other credentials. Wood and Williams (2013) cited data from a

2009 DOE report which noted that 11.5% of Black male students will leave the

community college without credentials within one year after enrollment, 48.9% after

three years, and 83% after six years. While success at the community college is

important for all students, it is crucial for this population, based on the data that shows

that Black men in their early 30s are more likely to end up in prison than earn a

bachelor's degree (Strayhorn, 2012b).

Black males attending community colleges possess different characteristics from their university counterparts. They tend to be older, married, with dependents, financially independent, and to have delayed college entry (Wood & Williams, 2013). This is a far cry from the description of the typically retained student, who usually enrolls in college directly after high school (at age 18 or 19), attends full time, and comes from a White or Asian family with educated parents who have relatively high incomes and a high socioeconomic status. Many have also attended a high-quality high school, taken college preparatory courses, received good or excellent grades in high school, and scored well on standardized tests (Wood & Williams, 2013).

The study of persistence. The earliest attempt to empirically understand persistence in higher education was in 1938, when McNeely used data from 60 higher education institutions to try to determine why students were not being retained. However, it was not until the 1960s that research on undergraduate persistence began in earnest (Demetriou & Schmitz-Scborski, 2012). By that time, the G.I. Bill of 1944, the 1950 Truman Commission Report, the Higher Education Act of 1965, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Bahr & Gross, 2016; Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Peterson, 2007) had led to rapid growth in college enrollment for all Americans as well as increased access to higher education for once underrepresented populations from low-income families and minority populations. By the end of the 1960s, discovering ways to keep students enrolled became a priority for colleges and universities (Demetriou & Schmitz-Scborski, 2012).

A decline in enrollment in the 1980s led to the development of enrollment management practices that emphasized the collaboration of all college departments on

improving enrollment and retention. Theories abounded during this time as colleges and universities focused more on keeping their students enrolled (Demetriou & Schmitz-Scborski, 2012). One of these was Bean's 1981 Student Attrition Model which explained how students' background characteristics such as high school academic performance played a crucial role in their college success (Demetriou & Schmitz-Scborski, 2012). A subsequent revision of his theory widened its applicability to institutions other than four-year schools and to non-White populations (Demetriou & Schmitz-Scborski, 2012).

However, it was not until the late 1990s that research started to really focused on the persistence and retention of men of color, specifically Blacks and Latinos (Harris & Wood, 2013). By the start of the 21st century, research on Black men in higher education had increased substantially. Common to most of these studies was their focus on Black males at four-year institutions and not at community colleges. Much of the research also had a decidedly negative bent focusing more on the deficits, or what was lacking in those who did not succeed, than on what had helped others succeed. Researchers like Harper (2010, 2012, 2015) are trying to change the narrative on Black men in college by researching Black male success through an anti-deficit framework. The use of this framework does not minimize the continued struggles of Black men to persist in higher education, but it offers the opportunity to use what is learned from those who succeed to help those who do not.

According to Crisp and Mina (2012), institutional characteristics and practices specific to the community college also play a role in the persistence of its students. For one, research has shown that almost two-thirds of faculty at community colleges are employed part time. This provides limited time for them to interact with students

academically and socially outside the classroom. Further contributing to this lack of interaction is the fact that most community colleges are commuter schools, most of the students are part time, and many of them work. Therefore, many community college students leave school immediately after classes. Finally, many community colleges do not have the academic resources for students and professional resources for faculty because of the lower levels of funding they receive compared to their four-year counterparts (Crisp & Mina, 2012).

Theoretical Background

Since its introduction in the 1970s, Tinto's theory of student departure and integration (1975, 1987, 1993) has been the predominant theoretical framework on persistence in higher education. Tinto purported that the desire to remain at an institution was based largely in part on how integrated students were into the academic and social milieu of the institution. While important to the understanding of persistence, researchers into college experience of men of color felt that Tinto's theory did not capture the complexities of this population's persistence efforts (Harris & Wood, 2013) since it focused on traditional students in four-year institutions. Harris and Wood (2013) noted that although Tinto's departure theory is often used in research on men of color (MOC) in the community college, it is often criticized for its "assimilationist assumptions" (p.182.) and contextualizing success in terms of what the students does or does not do. This emphasis excludes the role that the institution and other variables play in student success (Harris & Wood, 2013). However, while acknowledging that there are criticisms of Tinto's model, Wood (2014) in his research on Black men and the academic variables that affect their attainment and persistence, used Tinto's theory as the framework for his

study. Wood (2014) also cited the theory's prevalent use in research on two-year institutions, noting that in spite of the criticism the theory was found to be "applicable and useful" (p.606) in this context. Strayhorn (2012b), who also used Tinto's theory in his own research, explained that it still had its relevance in understanding college attrition in non-traditional populations.

Although the current study explored the challenges Black males face in the community college, it also sought to examine the attributes of those students who did persist by using Harper's Anti-deficit Framework (Harper, 2010, 2012). In addition, the underachievement of Black male collegians was explored using Bourdieu's 1986 Theory of Social Reproduction; Rendon's (1994) Validation Theory; and Strayhorn's (2012a) Sense of Belonging theory. In addition, the non-cognitive domain, one of the five domains posited by Wood and Harris (as cited in Harris & Wood, 2013) as contributing to the success of Black males in higher education was also used to inform this study. This domain also explores a sense of belonging as well as identity. Finally, Bronfenbrenner's (1993) ecology model was also used as a framework to inform this study.

Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction. Black males flock to the community college in large part to advance themselves economically and socially, but often struggle to persist (Wood & Williams, 2013). As Patton, et. al. (2016) noted Bourdieu theorized that education "creates, maintains, and reproduces inequality" (p. 250). In the context of higher education, this inequality comes about when non-traditional students try to navigate the complexities of college without the necessary skills to do so. Using Bourdieu (1986) terminology these students would be described as lacking the capital, academic, social, and cultural, that is evident in traditional students,

especially those from the higher socioeconomic classes. According to Bourdieu (1986) these students would have acquired this capital from their parents, friends, and experiences. Academic capital is acquired through a rigorous and challenging education that prepares students for college, cultural capital is the shared information and skills amongst the privileged classes, and social capital is that network of family and friends as well as lived experiences that imbue members of the privileged classes with the resources to navigate a wide variety of social interactions (Arnold & Barratt, 2015). When Bourdieu's (1986) theory is used in the context of Black men in higher education, this lack of capital is evident and understandable (Arnold & Barratt, 2015) because Black male students are often first-generation from high schools that did not adequately prepare them for college (Wood and Williams, 2013). With neither parents nor high schools to prepare them for college, many of them are not adequately prepared for college. Patton, et al. (2016) described how this lack of capital could impact students:

> One's degree of cultural capital might shape postsecondary institutional choice and be the difference between selecting a community college versus a four-year state institution or a more elite university. Such a decision would be based upon one's access to and knowledge of the college-going process. (p. 251)

Rendon's Validation Theory. At the intersection of what is lacking in the student and what the institution lacks is Rendon's (1994) theory of validation. Against a backdrop of drastically changing demographics on college campuses in the 1990s, Rendon (1994) posited that institutions needed a model of learning and development that was applicable to the diverse populations entering higher education. A critic of traditional student development theories that focused primarily on White students attending four-year institutions, Rendon (1994) explained the need for validation, or an

assurance of one's value and importance in a secure environment, in nontraditional student populations. According to Rendon (1994), these students did not exude the confidence of their traditional counterparts, and often expressed doubt about their ability to succeed academically. Validation is not limited to a particular setting, but can happen in the classroom, in the community, or through student organizations. Rendon (1994) recommended that validation start early in the student's college experience.

Strayhorn's Sense of Belonging Theory. While the concept of belonging and its importance to persistence were well established in research on persistence in higher education, research on belonging and the Black male student in higher education was sparse (Strayhorn, 2012a). Strayhorn (2012a) described a sense of belonging as feeling socially supported on campus, feeling connected to the institution, and feeling valued and respected. He argued that a lack of a sense of belonging could affect academic performance and a student's desire to continue in college. He defined a sense of belonging this way:

> In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers). It's a cognitive evaluation that typically leads to an effective response or behavior (p. 3).

Wood and Harris' Five domains of African-American Male Student Success. In their exploration of the in-college factors that interact with the pre-college factors to determine the success of Black males, Wood and Harris (as cited in Harris & Wood, 2013) identified five domains that are of importance to this population's attainment. Of these five domains (academic, environmental, institutional, social, and non-cognitive

domain), only the non-cognitive domain, which includes a sense of belonging and identity, was used to inform this study. As Harris and Wood (2013) noted, this domain deals with the emotional and psychological needs and responses of the Black male in the college environment. Hence, the Black male's sense of belonging and sense of identity are two important factors in this domain. This domain adds further credence to Strayhorn's (2012a) research which identified a correlation on how supported and valued Black men feel on college campuses and their persistence. The non-cognitive domain also included the complex construct of race/ethnicity and gender and how they influence the success of Black collegians. Harris and Wood (2013), who used this construct of the non-cognitive domain in their research, found that the men believed it was important to support their families financially while still in school. Although they knew it could adversely affect their academics, providing for their families was tied to their male identities. Also telling was the participants' unwillingness to seek academic, financial or personal assistance because this was not considered masculine, both culturally and socially. Masculinity was expressed in terms of "vigor, independence, and resilience" (Harris & Wood, 2013, p. 179).

Harper's Anti-deficit Achievement Framework. While the theories and frameworks used in the current study are valuable in understanding Black males in the community college, their focus is primarily on the lack within the student. However, Harper's (2010, 2012) anti-deficit model examines what makes these students successful. He does not dismiss the many challenges facing Black men in college, including lower persistence and lack of completion, but takes issue with the "deficit orientation that is constantly reinforced in media, academic research journals, and educational

practice…Those who are interested in Black male student success have much to learn from Black males who have actually been successful" (Harper, 2012, p. 4). Harper's (2012) theory reframes what is often the negative focus of research on this population to what "researchers could explore to better understand how Black undergraduate men successfully navigate their way to and through higher education and onward to rewarding post-college options" (p. 8). This anti-deficit framework focuses on three aspects of the students' lives: pre-college socialization and readiness, college achievement, and post-college success. While the latter is outside the scope of this study, the first two areas were explored. As recommended by Harper (2012), the current study also explored the impact of faculty on the success of Black male collegians.

Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Developmental Ecology (1993). Bronfenbrenner (1993) developed a bioecological model to show how human beings develop based on the different systems and environments within which they interact. These systems are not static nor are they unrelated; instead they are an interrelated and dynamic web of nested environments. According to Bronfenbrenner (1993), humans interact within five systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The microsystem includes the intimate and immediate relationships, including family, friends, and teachers (Mendoza, Malcolm, & Parish, 2015; Vacchi & Berger, 2015). Renn and Arnold (2003) extended this setting to also include the church and employment settings in one's personal lives and residential halls, classes, and student organizations in one's college life. The mesosystem is the interaction or connections between the various variables in the microsystems. For example, being employed while enrolled in college

can influence the student's success in classes (Mendoza, et al., 2015; Vacchi & Berger, 2015).

The exosystem refers to the social settings that have a direct impact or influence on the student over which the student has no control. These include institutional policies and procedures such as admissions, curriculum, and financial aid as well as socioeconomic status. The macrosystem comprises the broader political, social, cultural, and economic environment within which the student interacts (Vacchi & Berger, 2015). Finally, the chronosystem includes the generational influences such as the differences seen in baby boomers versus millennials; the influences of major historical events, for example 9/11; and the influences of social movements like the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. This system also takes into account life transitions as humans develop from entering college to going to work to having family responsibilities (Mendoza, et al., 2015).

Research on Black Men in Higher Education

Repeatedly in the research, Black men in higher education were consistently near or at the bottom on most indicators of success, including enrollment, achievement, engagement, attainment, and persistence (Wood & Ireland, 2014; Wood & Palmer, 2013). Harper (2012) also noted the racial disparities in their enrollment rate in higher education institutions, which remained stagnant at 4.3% from 1976 to 2002. Another constant in the research on Black male students in higher education, both at four-year institutions and community colleges, was the complexity of factors affecting their success (Dulabaum, 2016). These factors or barriers can be classified as personal, societal or environmental, familial, and institutional. While the barriers to the achievement of Black men in higher

education are well documented, there is less research on what makes these men succeed. However, the anti-deficit approach is becoming more prominent (Harper, 2010, 2012, 2015). This study will add to the extant literature on Black men in the community college using the anti-deficit framework, but without exclusion of the barriers.

Pre-college factors and persistence. A number of pre-college factors conflate to influence the persistence of Black men after they enroll in college. Age is often cited as a pre-college factor in the success of Black males who attend community colleges (Harris & Wood, 2013; Strayhorn, 2012b). However, age alone is not the cause of Black male problems; instead it is the responsibilities that often come with being older (Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2001-2002). Older students are more likely to have dependents and the ensuing financial responsibilities that come with having a family. These responsibilities then make it necessary for them to work, which in turn can affect their academic success. Wood (2014) explained that Black men were more likely than their other male counterparts to leave college during their first year for personal reasons including family responsibilities. Strayhorn (2012b) stressed the need for adequate resources and support from the college to prevent these students from dropping out. These include childcare, flexible class, 24-hour study areas, and targeted learning communities. Furthermore, many of these students are also under tremendous stress from shouldering the financial and familial burden in households with absent fathers (Ingram, et al., 2018). Since many of these students already come unprepared for college, these added stressors are further challenges to their success.

Institutional factors and persistence. Institutional structures and characteristics play a critical role in the persistence of Black men in the community college setting.

Researchers agree that institutions hold some responsibility and accountability for the success of these students. While lauded for the open-access policies that provide opportunities to the underrepresented and nontraditional student, community colleges have also been criticized for their poor retention rates. Harris and Wood (2013) maintained that community colleges should provide adequate resources for these students and implement practices that meet the students' needs. In one study of community colleges in Texas, Black men did better academically when the institutions offered advisement specifically for freshmen; credit-bearing orientation courses; mandatory tutoring for at-risk students; and well-promoted counseling services (Harris & Wood, 2013).

  Faculty interaction. Interaction with faculty has been identified as one of the key contributing factors to the persistence of Black men (Wood, 2014). Using data from the 2003-2004 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Wood (2014) found that Black men who had informal meetings with faculty were much more likely to persist. These interactions were so vital that Black male collegians who had informal or social contact with faculty had a 184% greater chance of persisting than those who did not have such interactions (Wood, 2014). This research stressed the importance of hiring faculty who are amenable to cultivating positive student-faculty relationships, especially outside of the classroom. The study further suggested that higher education institutions include these informal interactions in the faculty evaluation process as they do with formal interactions (Wood, 2014). Ironically, although Black men usually need more interaction with faculty, they are the least likely to seek help (Bush & Bush, 2010). Wood and Ireland (2014) found that older Black male students were more likely to engage with

faculty; however, the influence of age diminished once environmental and academic factors were considered.

  Sense of belonging. A sense of belonging refers to a student's perception of how the college makes them feel. A supportive environment or campus culture where students feel supported, respected, and validated leads to the belief that they belong (Harris & Wood, 2013; Strayhorn, 2012a). This meaningful connection to and with the college environment is vital to students remaining at an institution, especially minority males (Harris & Wood, 2013). Strayhorn, Lo, Travers, & Tillman-Kelly (2015) noted that campus climate was also important to these students' sense of belonging or their ability to feel connected to and accepted by their institutions. Black collegians at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) have a lower sense of belonging than their counterparts at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). This was attributed, in part, to the unwelcoming and alienating climate at some of the PWIs (Strayhorn, et al., 2015).

  Harper (2015) also addressed the campus climate challenges Black men faced especially at PWIs by examining the racial stereotypes these students encounter on campus. He noted that such negative campus climates can affect Black men both psychologically and academically. Black men are often more likely to be stereotyped in higher education than other racial and ethnic groups. Harper's (2015) study revealed that the stereotypes persisted even for high-achieving students such as the 143 participants he interviewed at 30 PWIs. These Black men reported having to confront stereotypes of them being drug dealers, good dancers, or the most pervasive stereotype, that they were all student athletes. The latter stemmed from the inherent belief that these students were accepted at their institutions because of their athletic ability as against their academic

acumen. As one participant noted, "Everybody knows that I don't play sports, but they keep suggesting I should. I came to Amherst College to be a scholar – why is that so impossible to fathom?" (p. 660). These stereotypes were evident in the comments and behavior of both students and faculty. To combat the negativity, many students actively sought to dispel the myths by assuming leadership roles and aiming for higher academic achievement. Amongst Harper's (2015) recommendations to improve this often-hostile environment, were honest dialogue by faculty and administrators about their biases and faculty development to address both classroom and campus climate.

Brooms (2016), who also identified campus climate as a major barrier to the success of Black students, especially at historically white institutions, advocated for student involvement in Black male initiative (BMI) programs to improve their sense of belonging. The researcher explained that these targeted programs increased academic motivation, gave students a heightened sense of self, improved access to sociocultural capital and gave them an increased sense of belonging. These programs were also seen as both a safe space for Black male to freely discuss issues pertaining to them as well as a counter space that made the students feel at home (Brooms, 2016).

Bush and Bush (2010) addressed the underachievement and lack of persistence of Black males attending community colleges by studying this issue at a community college in California. Their analysis of the results showed that Black men scored lower on all the measures of success when compared to other ethnic groups. Furthermore, only 25% of the incoming Black male students continued past the first semester. Two years into their studies, 56% had left. The findings on persistence at this one institution were not only in keeping with those for Black men in community colleges statewide, but with national

data that showed that the attrition rates for Black men are higher the longer they remain

enrolled in community college (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Bush and Bush

(2010) further contended that Black men were more dissatisfied with and more

disengaged from their institutions than any other racial group. The study concluded that

many institutions truly believe that they are treating all of the students the same

regardless of their race. However, this stance diminished the real perceptions of these

students and puts the problem on the students and not the institution. They noted,

"Institutional stakeholders, unconsciously or consciously, are creating a community

environment through their embedded practices that are in conflict with the ethos of Black

male students" (Bush & Bush, 2010, p. 54).

Deficits and persistence. The research on Black men attending community

colleges is replete with the deficits they bring to college. For example, Bourdieu's 1986

Theory of Social Reproduction has been used extensively in higher education research to

explain the lack of capital – economic, social, and cultural – in this population

(Strayhorn, 2012b). However, there has been an increasing call for recognition of the

alternate capital Black men bring to college including their own cultural capital and the

aspirational capital they have to succeed and improve their lives (Harper, 2012;

Strayhorn, 2012b; Brooms, 2016; Wang, et al. 2018). Nonetheless, this clarion call does

not negate or diminish the barriers faced by Black male collegians or the need for them to

acquire the capitals of the traditional student since these assets are needed to succeed in

college (Strayhorn, 2012b).

Academic capital. Many Black male collegians attending community colleges

often lack the foundational knowledge and skills often acquired in rigorous high school

classes (Arnold & Barratt, 2015). There is a strong relationship between the lack of this academic capital and poor performance in college. These academic deficits start early in the K-12 system where more Black men are funneled into special education classes and are suspended more than any other race or gender (Strayhorn, 2012b). While schools in higher socioeconomic neighborhoods offer 15 or more advanced placement (AP) courses that prepare students for college, minority-serving schools offer fewer or none at all (Strayhorn, 2012b). One student in a 2016 study by Harper and Newman noted:

> I came from a predominantly Black high school. I wasn't as prepared for college as I would have liked to have been. I did take advantage of advanced placement courses, yet our curriculum wasn't as strong as that of my peers here (p. 12).

The two hundred and nineteen Black undergraduates in the study all had high GPAs and were socially engaged on their campus and with faculty. Yet, without the academic capital they still struggled during their first year in college.

Not surprisingly, Harper and Newman (2016) found that students who received the academic and social capital they needed prior to enrolling in college had the smoothest transitions and adjustments to college. Further compromising their academic success are the negative stereotypes associated with Black men such as "threatening, uneducable, and lazy" (Strayhorn, 2012b, p. 359), which follow them throughout their education. These stereotypes are often internalized by Black men, resulting in self-fulfilling prophecies of underachievement.

Social capital. Bourdieu's theory of social capital, or the social connections and relationships used to successfully navigate through all of our environs, is often used to explain why Black men have a difficult time in college (Arnold & Barratt, 2015; Brooms, 2016; Wells, 2008-2009). Without parents, family members, or peers who have attended

college, many Black men do not have that access to this vital social network that assist them with navigating college. Students with social capital usually share similar lived experiences that give them a familiarity with and confidence in their shared environments such as college (Arnold & Barratt, 2015). Conversely, students without shared social capital can experience what is akin to culture shock when transitioning to college, since they do not know or understand what is expected of them as college students. Even new student orientations are structured with the assumption that students have a basic understanding of college and often do not account for the lack of social capital in first-generation students (Arnold & Barratt, 2015).

Cultural capital. Cultural capital is first acquired in the home and is further accrued through education. This form of capital refers to "the knowledge base and skill set of the prestige social class" (Arnold & Barratt, 2015, p. 189) that includes etiquette and a specific way of speaking. This capital is accrued naturally in homes where the parents are college educated and students with this knowledge are at an advantage in college because professors and college employees usually value this type of capital. Consequently, Black male community college students are put at a clear disadvantage since many of them are first-generation college students and from lower socioeconomic circumstances. Wells (2008-2009) argued that regardless of the institution, students with the most cultural capital were the most likely to succeed.

Sociocultural capital. Although these constructs are often dealt with separately in the literature, Wells (2008-2009) explained that the two forms of capital are difficult to separate. Whether dealt with as separate or combined constructs, these two forms of important capital are often said to be lacking in Black male college students, which

negatively impacts their persistence (Wells, 2008-2009). Brooms (2016) placed the responsibility on the college to assist these students and advocated for (BMI) programs to help students understand and navigate the complex sociocultural dynamics of college. These programs provide students with the opportunity to share information and resources, establish a sense of community, and share a collective consciousness and identity. They are also instrumental in teaching students how to handle stereotypes and microaggressions.

Harper and Newman (2016) explained that many students found it difficult to integrate socially into their colleges. "The characterization of their transitions (turbulent or seamless) was largely influenced by how they made sense of the academic, social and cultural changes, contrasts and surprises (Harper & Newman, 2016, p. 20). The researchers strongly advocated for summer bridge programs for Black men before attending college and participation in student organizations once on campus to promote sociocultural literacy.

Anti-deficit approach to persistence. Finally, this study will use an anti-deficit approach to Black male persistence. While many Black male collegians may not have the capital of the prestige class, they do have their own assets that can assist them in college. Brooms (2016) acknowledged that many of these students bring alternative cultural assets that are often overlooked since they are not from the ruling class. Strayhorn (2012b) reiterated this in his exploration of the factors influencing the retention of Black men at two-year community colleges. He explained that many of these students inherited different forms of cultural capital rooted in their community and a sense of caring for others. Another form of capital is the aspirations Black men have about their

postsecondary education. Wang, et al. (2018) explored the educational aspirations of Black men in the community college and found that this strong desire to success did not always decrease as suggested by previous research. However, Strayhorn (2012b) cautioned that in order to succeed in college these students must still master the sociocultural capital of the prestige class, which at times can seem like an additional course they have to understand.

Conclusion

Once excluded from higher education in the United States, Black men gained increased access to a college education through the community college system. With their open access policy and variety of educational offerings from degrees to vocational certificates, community colleges offered these men and other minority populations a chance for social and economic mobility (Wang, Winkle-Wagner, Sun, & Gaskew, 2018; Wood & Williams, 2013). Currently, Black men attend community colleges in higher numbers than any other racial or ethnic group (Ingram & Coaxum, 2018; Strayhorn, 2012b; Wood & Ireland, 2014; Wood & Palmer, 2013; Wood & Williams, 2013; Xiong & Wood, 2018).

However, the low persistence rates of Black men in these institutions are troubling (Wood & Ireland, 2014; Wood & Palmer, 2013). Many reasons have been posited for their underachievement, including familial and social pressures, and the lack of academic, social, and cultural capital (Strayhorn, 2012b). Since Black males attending community colleges tend to be older, they often have more responsibilities such as jobs and families than the traditional student (Wells, 2008-2009; Wood & Williams, 2013). Also impacting the success of this population are issues pertaining to the structure of

community colleges. Most are commuter schools, which limit the social interaction students may have on campus with faculty and staff (Bahr & Gross,2016; Crisp & Mina, 2012. This lack of interaction with faculty is one of the key determinants in the persistence of Black men community colleges (Wood, 2014). Other institutional factors such as systemic racism and pervasive negative stereotypes on and off campus about Black men, also contribute to their low attainment (Beatty & McElderry, 2018).

Increasingly, there has been a call to highlight successes of Black male students in higher education and their positive attributes. This is a major paradigm shift in higher education research that has resulted in increased focus on the anti-deficit framework (Harper, 2010, 2012, 2015). Researchers are recognizing that Black male students have their own form of capital that could be of use in college (Strayhorn, 2012b, Wang, et al. 2018). However, this alternative capital is often overlooked. Therefore, the current study adopted an anti-deficit approach, since its goal was to ascertain why and how Black men persist in spite of the well-documented barriers. With this information, high schools will have first-hand recommendations as to how to prepare these students for college, and community colleges can develop or improve practices and policies to facilitate these students' persistence.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand the factors that influence the persistence of Black male students in the community college setting. Theoretical lenses such as Bronfenbrenner's (1993) Theory of Developmental Ecology were used to provide a framework for the two major research questions and one exploratory question that guided the research. First, what were Black male students' perceptions of the factors that led them to pursue an education in a community college? Second, what were Black male students' perceptions of the factors that helped facilitate their persistence in a community college? These two questions sought to ascertain the lived experiences (personal, familial, institutional, cultural, and societal) of Black males before and after attending college. Third, based on these experiences, what recommendations did these students have for their counterparts about succeeding at the community college?

Qualitative Approach

The qualitative approach is often employed by the researcher who wants an in-depth understanding of a phenomena, especially the reasons for participants' behavior (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). Qualitative research also allows the researcher to study the phenomena in the natural environment "through the 'voice' of the participants" (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013, p. 112). Much of the research on Black men in postsecondary institutions is based on secondary analyses of data from national databases which constrains what the researcher can measure. Therefore, in keeping with the intent of this research study to get an in-depth, first-hand understanding of the complexity of

factors that influence the persistence of Black males in the community college setting, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was used.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA is a qualitative research method used to explore or gain an understanding of the lived experiences of several participants who have experienced a similar phenomenon (Alase, 2017). The data collected is solely from the participants' perspective, and using IPA "allows the interviewees (research participants) to express themselves and their 'lived experience' stories the way they see fit without any distortion…." (Alase, p. 9). Hence, using IPA allowed the researcher to get close to the participants' world and gave the researcher the opportunity to understand their personal experiences. Another important component of IPA is the interpretation of the data. Smith and Osborn (2007) described IPA as a two-part process "in which the participants are trying to make sense of their world; [and] the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (p. 53). The IPA approach is also designed to see the subject holistically and recognizes the link between what a person says and thinks, and their emotional state (Smith & Osborn, 2007). One limitation of this methodology, however, is that not everyone can effectively articulate their thoughts and feelings, or they may not want to share those thoughts and feelings. The researcher is then left to "interpret people's mental and emotional state from what they say" (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 54).

Sample size. Although there is no prescribed number, the sample size in IPA research is typically small because of the in-depth interpretative analysis required of this methodological approach (Smith & Osborn, 2007). A sample size that is too large can become unmanageable and can lead to superficial results (Creswell, 2012,). Sample sizes

in previous IPA studies have ranged from one participant to as many as 25 (Alase, 2017; Smith & Osborn, 2007). While the chosen methodology was one of the determining factors in the sample size for this study, data saturation was also a contributing factor. Fusch and Ness (2015) noted that there are multiple ways to reach saturation, one of which is when no new themes emerge during the data collection process. By the third interview of this study, similar themes and patterns were evident. To ensure that no new themes were emerging, the researcher interviewed two additional student and ended the research when no new themes emerged.

Setting

The setting for this study was one of the smaller campuses of a large, urban two-year college in Florida with a predominantly Hispanic population. As of 2017, Black non-Hispanic students made up 17% of the college's total enrollment and 18% of the total population at the campus where the research was conducted. In the fall of 2017, of the 3,735 Black men enrolled at the college, 41% attended full time, 59% attended part time, and 38% were of traditional age, between 18 to 20 years old. The average age of all students at the college was 25.21. That same fall, 211 Black males were attending the specific campus where the research was conducted, 162 of whom were continuing students. College-wide, of the 641 Black male students who started in fall 2016, 276 students, or 43.1%, did not return for the fall 2017 semester. The remaining 56.9% had either returned or graduated. No specific data was available for the specific campus where the research was conducted (Masked Name, personal communication, 2017).

Participants

The five participants in this study were Black males who were attending or had recently graduated from the same campus of the two-year college where the research was conducted. Four of them were still currently enrolled at the college, one of whom was pursuing a second associate degree from the same college. The fifth student had recently graduated and was waiting to transfer to a Florida four-year university. All of the participants were over the age of 18 and gave their consent to participate in the study. Each participant chose a pseudonym to protect his privacy and ensure confidentiality. All five participants lived in the immediate environs of the campus. Three of the participants had graduated from two of the major public high schools in the area; one had attended a local charter school; and one had attended a public school outside of the area.

John Michael, a 20-year-old business administration major, said he had a passion for music and business and described himself as "just trying to get by." Derek Smith, a 20-year-old computer engineering major, said he found his passion for technology and computer engineering at the age of 13 after participating in a technology program while in middle school. Steve Brown, a 22-year-old sociology major, described himself as an orphan, having lost his mother when he was six years old. John Smith, who had already completed an associate degree in film, had returned to the college to complete another associate degree in business administration to give himself more employment options. Finally, 22-year-old Alfredo Bowman had recently completed his associate in degree in environmental science and was waiting to transfer to a four-year university in Florida. (See Appendix E for more detailed demographic information on the five participants.)

Data Collection

Approval was granted by both the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) of the University of Miami (UM) and the research site to conduct the study on the persistence of Black males in the community college. Using purposeful and word-of-mouth sampling, five students were recruited to participate in the study. Purposeful sampling was used to collect data since this method allowed the researcher to intentionally select individuals based on a specific need (Black males) and purpose (persistence) and to also intentionally select the research site (Creswell, 2012; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). Through word-of-mouth and the use of flyers, the researcher informed on-campus programs such as TRIO (a federal program that serves underrepresented students from disadvantaged backgrounds) and individuals such as academic, admission, and financial aid advisors about the research study.

Once students were referred, snowball sampling was also used where participants were asked to recommend other students to participate in the study (Creswell, 2012). Students who agreed to participate in the study and met the criteria (Black males attending the college who had completed at least two semesters) were sent a recruitment email (see Appendix A), that explained the purpose as well as the confidential and voluntary nature of the study. Students were also made aware that their agreement to be interviewed would be deemed as consent in this minimal risk study, thereby negating the need for a signed consent form. Students were also sent a demographic survey via email to ascertain information such as their high school GPA and level of education of their parents (see Appendix B).

An interview protocol form (with the questions and space for notes) was developed to provide structure and consistency to the interview process across all participants (see Appendix C). Furthermore, participants were assured that their identity and information would be kept confidential. Participants were also notified of their right to terminate their participation in the study at any time during the process.

One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were completed in private and in person with each participant. Prior to each interview, participants were asked to give their permission to be audio recorded. The questions were primarily open-ended to evoke expansive responses without the constraints of only choosing from the answers on a survey or answering "yes" or "no". Open-ended questions also allowed participants to share their lived-experiences without being influenced by the researcher's stance or the results of previous studies (Creswell, 2012). When necessary additional questions were asked for clarification or elaboration, with care taken to probe without influencing the participants' answers. This type of questioning also suited the chosen methodology. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) seeks to capture first hand, the lived experience of participants about a shared phenomenon (Alase, 2017). Additional phone interviews were also conducted to clarify participants' original responses and to pose new questions as themes emerged from the interviews and the literature (see Appendix D). All interviews were audio recorded to ensure an accurate record and handwritten notes were also taken as an additional resource (Creswell, 2012).

Data Analysis

One of the first crucial steps in the analysis of qualitative data derived from interviews is to prepare and organize the information. After each interview, the audio

recording and transcribed notes were saved under a pseudonym to a password protected file on the researcher's personal computer. Each file identified the date and time the interview was conducted. The audio recordings were sent to a third-party transcription service to be converted into text data, which helped to facilitate the data analysis. Once the transcripts were returned, they were reviewed for accuracy and reread multiple times to get an in-depth understanding of the details which made it easier to later disaggregate the data (Creswell, 2012). They were then password protected and saved on the researcher's personal computer.

The research data for this study was analyzed using the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. Creating meaning from the data collected is central to IPA and the researcher's goal was to "try to understand the content and complexity of those meanings" (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 66) to better comprehend the participant's world. To do so, the researcher had to have what Smith and Osborn (2007) called an "interpretative relationship with the transcript" (p.66) which involved a step-by-step analysis of the data. Although IPA as a methodology has its flexibility, giving each researcher some leverage to make adaptations to fit the needs of the study, the analysis of the findings was based on those outlined by Smith and Osborn (2007).

Emerging themes. After multiple readings of each transcript and making notes in the margin on interesting and significant findings, the next step in the analytical process was to look for emerging themes. This involved taking the initial notes and looking for patterns within each interview and across the interviews. As recommended by Smith and Osborn (2007) transforming notes into themes was done for the entire transcript. The emerging themes were written in the margin of the transcript and the

researcher then began to connect the themes. Therefore, the list of themes went from being chronological – the order in which they appeared – to being analyzed for similarities and differences within each interview and then across all interviews.

Superordinate and subordinate themes. As the clustering and connections were made, the researcher, following the recommendations of Smith and Osborn (2007), made sure they were truly representative of what the participants said. This constant analysis and revisiting of data are highly recommended in IPA, since interpretations of the data must be accurate. "As a researcher one is drawing on one's interpretative resources to make sense of what the person is saying, but at the same time one is constantly checking one's own sense-making against what the personal actually said" (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 72). The clusters or superordinate themes were then given titles such as "impetus for attending college" and "facilitators of their success." Subordinate themes were then listed under each superordinate theme. For example, the superordinate theme "facilitators in their success" was further broken down into subordinate themes such as professors, family, and friends.

Final themes. As is common in the IPA approach, the superordinate themes from one transcript were used to inform the analysis of the other transcripts (Smith & Osborn, 2007). This allowed the researcher to identify both similarities and differences in the accounts of the participants. Once the final themes were extrapolated, they were analyzed and put in narrative form. At this stage of the interpretative process it was necessary to ensure that the distinction was made in the narrative between what the respondent said and the researcher's interpretation or analysis of what was said. To do so, the researcher again reviewed the transcripts and also emailed the participants

summaries of the themes that emerged from the research for their validation. This latter process, known as member checking, ensured that the data analysis and ensuing themes were an accurate account of the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2012).

 Trustworthiness

As with other forms of research, qualitative research also has to meet rigorous criteria to establish its trustworthiness or validity. While the constructs for doing so differ from those of quantitative research, there are no less exacting or essential. Shenton (2004) pointed to the four constructs - credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability - that have gained credence in analyzing trustworthiness in qualitative research. All four of these constructs were used in this study to attest to the trustworthiness of the research and its findings.

Credibility. Considered one of the key components in establishing trustworthiness, credibility is established by ensuring that the study measures what it sets out to measure. As recommended by Shenton (2004), credibility in this study was achieved by adopting well-established research methods established for qualitative research, specifically IPA analysis. Therefore, the general procedures for qualitative research as outlined by research specialist, Creswell (2012), were followed. The researcher also followed the specific guidelines for research using IPA analysis recommended by Smith & Osborn (2007).

Another way to ensure credibility is to use various methods to ensure participants are being honest. For this study, the researcher followed Shenton's (2004) recommendations and gave each student the opportunity to refuse to participate in the study. Those who did participate were encouraged to speak frankly and openly with the

reassurance that there were no right or wrong answers. Participants were also reassured that the researcher was operating independently of the institution with an added assurance of privacy and confidentiality. They were also told that they had the right to discontinue their participation in the study at any juncture.

Finally, Shenton (2004) suggested adding another layer of trustworthiness by allowing those in a supervisory capacity to scrutinize the research. To this end, during the entire research process, the researcher had frequent meetings, in person as well as via email, with her study advisor, Dr. Debbiesiu Lee. Dr. Lee is an associate professor and tenured faculty member in the Educational and Psychology Studies Department within the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Miami. She also has over 20 years of experience as a qualitative researcher and expertise in ethnic minority outcomes in psychology and education. In her capacity as the external auditor for the study, Dr. Lee was given access to the transcribed data, the thematic findings, and analyses of the findings. Her feedback as external auditor was incorporated into every stage of the research process (Shenton, 2004).

In addition to the auditing process, additional theoretical and methodological discussions were held during monthly class sessions at the University of Miami with Dr. Lee, Dr. Carol-Anne Phekoo, an associate professor of Educational and Psychological Studies and Director of the Higher Education Leadership program, and Dr. Soyeon Ahn, professor in the Department of Educational and Psychological Studies. These interactions provided a forum for varying perspectives and research ideas to be discussed, adding further credibility to the research (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability

Transferability, or the generalization of the research findings, is also key to establishing trustworthiness. Qualitative research, in general, and the IPA approach, specifically, are concerned with providing an in-depth and rich understanding of a particular phenomenon. This focus on depth versus breadth can, at times, make it difficult for the results to be transferred to other environments and populations. As recommended, this qualitative researcher gave significant details on the type and location of the institution where the study was conducted and about the participants. The data collection methods and subsequent analysis of the findings were also detailed in the study (Shenton, 2004). It should be mentioned that even if a similar study resulted in different outcomes, this does not negate the trustworthiness of the original study since the contexts within which the studies are done could result in variations (Shenton, 2004).

Dependability and confirmability. These two measures of trustworthiness are interrelated and are dealt with together. In qualitative research, dependability can be addressed by reporting the processes of the study in detail so they can be easily replicated by another researcher. Such attention to detail should result in what Shenton (2004) called a "prototype model" (p.71) that allows the reader to comprehend the methodology and results. To this end, this study fully delineated each step of the study. Shenton (2004) correlated confirmability in qualitative research with objectivity in other forms of research. He acknowledged that confirmability or objectivity is often difficult since every measure, whether a test or questionnaire, is designed by a human being with the inevitable intrusion of that researcher biases. Nonetheless, researchers can still take steps to ensure that the "work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the

informants, rather than characteristics and preferences of the researcher," (p. 72).

Therefore, in accordance with Shenton (2004), the researcher must admit to biases or

preconceived ideas about the study. This will be discussed further in the researcher's

stance.

Another way to enable a reader to determine confirmability is to include a

detailed description of the methodology used in the study. Hence the researcher followed

Shenton's (2004) recommendation to include a data-oriented audit trail that allows any

reader to trace how the data was collected and processed during the study. As mentioned

previously, an external auditor, Dr. Lee, also provided feedback throughout the process.

Member checking was also used to validate the accuracy of the research findings

(Creswell, 2012). Participants were sent a report of the thematic findings and their

feedback was used to verify that the themes and subthemes extrapolated from the data

accurately and adequately captured their experiences.

Researcher's Stance

All research, including qualitative, is shaped by the perspective and experiences

of the researcher. As Malterud (2001) explained, "A researcher's background and

position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the

methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate,

and the framing and communication of conclusions" (pp. 483-484). My desire to explore

the factors that influence the persistence of Black men in community colleges was both

professional and personal. Personally, my perception of the societal and institutional

issues affecting Black males in higher education was shaped by my role as the mother of

a Black son. The shared lived experiences of the Black male students who visited my

office in the advisement department resonated more because of their relatability to those

of my son's. The students shared stories about subtle, racial microaggressions and overt

racial questions about their academic acumen. The researcher's personal understanding

of the population made their lived experiences more relatable and elicited more trust from

participants. This personal interest also gave the researcher a vested interest in accurately

researching and presenting the factors that lead to the success of Black males in higher

education.

Professionally, in the eight years I worked in higher education at the campus

where the research was conducted, I have witnessed the struggles of many Black male

students to succeed. Some of the factors were external such as poor academic

preparation and systemic racism and discrimination that accompany them from the

community to the college campus. There were also institutional factors. I have had

extensive conversations with other Black colleagues about the lack of representation of

Black men in the faculty and staff on the campus. Of the Black males on the campus,

only two were actively involved in on-campus events and initiatives that specifically

targeted Black men. Evidence that more needed to be done was borne out in the

anecdotal story of a white, male department chair admitting he did not know how to

relate to Black male students and how he should talk to them.

The researcher was also a member of an organization at the campus with a

specific focus on Black male students' success. Beta Mu Iota (BMI), also known as the

Black Male Initiative, was started at the research site in 2015. This was not a top-down

initiative, but one that was started by faculty and staff to combat the campus's abysmal

graduation rates of Black men. Black male students were highly visible on the campus,

but they were not graduating in large numbers. BMI was designed to improve the academic, personal, and professional development of its members.

In sum, the researcher does acknowledge some biases pertaining to the target population. My empathy for this population is fueled by the accounts of my son and my students about the societal and institutional racism they have faced. There were stories of professors blatantly questioning their academic ability and being followed around in stores. This meant finding a balance during the interview process between being a sympathetic listener and an independent researcher. This was not always easy as the lived experiences of these students were often graphic depictions of their struggle to succeed in life and in college. Recording the interviews and having them independently transcribed assured the accuracy of the data collection and analysis processes. Member-checking and the use of an external auditor also assisted in the accurate analysis of the data and the report of the results of this study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to ascertain the factors that influence the persistence of Black men in the community college. The research site was one of the campuses of a predominantly Hispanic, urban two-year college in Florida. Four of the five participants were still enrolled at the college, one of whom had already completed an associate degree and had returned to the same campus to complete another associate degree in a different area of study. The fifth participant had recently graduated from the college and was waiting to transfer to a state university in Florida.

Two major research questions and one exploratory question guided this qualitative study. First, what were Black male students' perceptions of the factors that led them to pursue an education in a community college? Second, what were Black male students' perceptions of the factors that helped facilitate their persistence in a community college? These two questions sought to ascertain the lived experiences (personal, familial, institutional, cultural, and societal) of Black males before and after attending college. Third, based on these experiences, what recommendations did the participants have for their counterparts about succeeding at the community college? To answer these research questions in depth, the study utilized an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) process. This methodology is best used to capture the detailed lived experiences of research participants who have experienced a similar phenomenon. The use of open-ended interview questions allowed the participants to tell their stories in their own words

Seven major themes emerged from the interviews with the students: 1) the importance of going to college and the impetus to go to college; 2) who or what

influenced them to attend college and why they finally chose to attend; 3) how prepared they were for college; 4) positive experiences while attending college; 5) the challenges and barriers to their success in college; 6) facilitators of their success once in college; and 7) recommendations for Black male students based on their experiences.

The Precollege Experience

At the time of the study, all five participants lived in proximity to the campus. However, only four of them had attended high school in the area. Alfredo, John Smith, and Steve graduated from public high schools in the feeder pattern of the campus and John Michael graduated from a local charter school. Derek, the fifth participant, attended a high school outside of the area. All of the participant lived at home with at least one biological parent, except Steve who lived with his aunt and uncle. They were all in their early twenties. To ascertain how their precollege experiences affected their college life, the five participants were asked about their familial, personal, institutional, cultural, and societal influences prior to starting college.

Why go to college? – "I wasn't going to sell drugs". How the five participants learned about college varied drastically depending on the level of family involvement, the educational attainment of family members, and where they attended high school. John Michael, whose mother has a Master's degree, learned about college primarily from her and his extended family. Both Derek and John Smith attributed their knowledge in small part to school and in larger part to their parents, who never attended college. In spite of having an older sister in college, Alfredo garnered most of his information about college from web searches and television. On the extreme side of the knowledge continuum was Steve who said college was not discussed in his family and he made the decision to attend

mostly on his own with some encouragement from his high school teachers. Although there was different impetus behind their eventual decision to attend college, all but one of the five participants viewed college as the primary way to succeed in life. John Michael, who had tremendous familial encouragement as well as adequate support from his high school, noted that while college was the most common way to succeed in life, it was not the only way. The business major noted:

> I knew about college, that it was one of the ways you could get a career or start a job in the world. College isn't the only, like, way to make it, but it's one of the most, like, common, and one that most people tell me to do….There's ways to make it without college, but you could also do it [succeed] without it [college], so there's no point of like just saying forget college when you can have both.

Other participants were not as ambivalent about the importance of college and were motivated to attend because they saw it as paramount to their success. For one student, his impetus for attending included the positive effect it would have on his siblings. Derek explained:

> I wanted to get an education. I wanted to spread my horizons…and also motivate my younger siblings coming behind me also to get a college degree….I just wanted to show them that it is through other ways to get out of the so-called ghetto and one is achieving a college degree and going after something you want.

For Alfredo, college was a way to escape the negative societal influences in his neighborhood. When asked why he ultimately decided to attend college, his immediate answer was that he was not going to sell drugs. He explained that growing up in his urban neighborhood, the only alternatives presented to him after high school were to be an athlete, to be an entertainer or to sell drugs. Adamant that he was not going to be a stereotype, Alfredo described his resistance to bad influences as such:

> I wasn't going to sell drugs and I wasn't going to ... I'm not an entertainer, so it was education. Education, sadly, because of my particular circumstance, was my first but last ... and I don't want to contradict myself…It was kind of my first, but kind of last option.

Prompted to clarify the contradictory statement, Alfredo explained that the laws in the United States required that his parents sent him to school at least from K -12. However, his immigrant parents from Haiti did not see college as the first or only means to financial success. Yet, he saw college as a means to upward mobility and to escape the temptations in his neighborhood.

College choice – "I don't have resources to instantly go to another university". After the decision to attend college came the choice as to where to attend. Ultimately, for all five participants, proximity was a key factor in their decision to attend their chosen campus. Alfredo's summation of the process echoed that of the other collegians:

> I am a native to the (MASKED) community, so (MASKED) college was literally in my backyard. So why not literally stay home, go to school right next to your home, and work a few blocks from your home? It made sense for me. It worked for my situation.

Affordability was also a major deciding factor in the college choice process for all five students. As John Michael explained:

> This is a way for me to get to where I want to be because I don't have like resources to instantly go to another university right after high school. So, it just made more sense with money, timing, and just my life.

Derek and Steve also mentioned the lower cost as the primary reason they chose to attend a community college rather than a four-year university. Steve rationalized that if for some reason he did not succeed at the community college at least he would have done so without taking out loans for expenses such as dorms. He also chose the community

college because he felt it would prepare him for university by teaching him how college works. Other participants also mentioned that the size of the campus was a selling point since it was one the college's smaller campuses. Only one student mentioned choosing the campus because it gave him a sense of belonging. Derek spoke about his initial response to be being there, "I felt at home at this college, and also at this campus. Once I stepped on campus, it just felt like home, so I just went for it."

The Facilitators and Influences

   Family – **Expectation of a better life.** While family played a pivotal role in some of the participant's decision to attend college, for others, family involvement was negligible to non-existent. For John Michael, who did not see college as the only way to succeed, his family specifically told him that "education is really important despite wanting to do other things outside of college." He credited his college-educated mother with helping him understand why it made sense to go to college even though he saw college as a "backup" and not a sure plan for his future. His mother also assisted him with the college processes including applying to college and completing his financial aid application. Derek, whose mother never attended college and whose father completed only one year of college, credited his parents for motivating and pushing him to attend college:

> They discussed…how tough it is to get to college. Secondly, what you
> have to do to get there and also, you know, how important it is to get an
> education and get a college degree to be able to live well in this life.

Although they were both born in America and have immigrant parents from Haiti who never attended college, John Smith and Alfredo had very different experiences when it came to parental involvement in their decision to go to college. In John Smith's case, his

parents encouraged him to attend college and assisted him with the application process.

Alfredo explained his parents' ambivalence about him attending college, noting that as

immigrants they wanted him to have a better life than they did, but this did not have to

include college. Going directly to work would have provided his family with additional

income. Alfredo noted:

> Well they are migrants, but that really isn't an excuse because education is
> pretty much global. I think they didn't discuss it because they didn't
> finish grade school themselves. And because of financial hardships, they
> wanted me to enter the workforce.

However, he did not negate their contribution to his attendance both indirectly and

directly. Speaking of his parents as "driving forces" in his life, Alfredo spoke of wanting

to make them happy, and wanting to fulfill the expectation his immigrant parents had of

their children achieving more than they did. Ultimately, he explained, how his parents

contributed in their own way to his education and ability to attend college:

> My father's the one who used his financial aid information so that I can be
> eligible and qualify for financial aid. So, he ... I guess he was a
> contributor. He also really wanted me in grade school to like, again, going
> back to what I said earlier, to not misbehave. So not misbehaving came
> with a lot of lectures on why I shouldn't misbehave. So, my father played a
> pretty heavy role. My mom, not so much. I think my mom kind of let my
> dad do like, the man thing and kind of like steer the boys while she kind of
> played her part with the girls more. So, my parents didn't play ... My
> parents weren't, you know, absolutely pro, you know, pro higher ed.

His older sister, however, was pro higher education and was attending the same college.

Although he described his sister's assistance with college as "minimal" and her influence

on his decision to attend college as "limited", just his exposure to a family member who

attended college was influential. He described his interaction with his sister this way:

> She finished college. And I think the reason why she played the biggest
> role was because I lived in the same space as her. So, if she was studying,
> if she was scheduling an appointment with an advisor, anything that she

had to do involving college or wrapped around it, even if it's in the
slightest way, I ... if I was around her at the time, I got a chance to kind of
like, soak that in.

In sharp contrast to the other participants who had varying levels of family involvement in their college processes, Steve's story was more about his family's lack of involvement. An aunt and uncle raised Steve, who described himself as an orphan, after his mother died when he was six years old. He explained that while his aunt and uncle talked to him about finishing high school, going to college was not mentioned. He said, "College wasn't too much brought up. It was something more on me that I wanted. I actually persevered to actually go through college because I wanted better. I honestly want better." He also credited seeing a picture of an uncle who had graduated as well as hearing his aunt mention that she wished she had gone to college as instrumental in his decision to go to college. His aunt, however, did not directly encourage him to go to college.

High school – "My high school didn't really play the biggest role". To varying degrees, the high schools participants attended contributed to their ultimate decision to attend college. However, some high schools were more efficient and effective in disseminating information about college than others. Of the five participants, Derek, who attended a high school outside of the area, was the most vociferous in his praise of his high school. He explained that his high school discussed different college majors and how they could be used after graduation. His high school also made sure he was placed in honors classes and encouraged him to take dual enrollment classes at another campus of the same college he now attended. The college credits he earned were applied to his current major. John Michael noted that his high school discussed college in terms of it

being a privilege by explaining that not everyone got the opportunity to go and those that did were lucky to do so. However, he does not count them amongst the main influences on his decision to go to college. That accolade was reserved for his college-educated mother. Nonetheless, acting on the encouragement of his teachers, he took three honors level classes in his senior year to boost his GPA and took the ACT, a standardized test used in the United States for college admission. Although Steve's high school teachers made college seem like a choice and not something he had to do, he explained that they still tried "to persuade you to go because actually you will benefit from it and so you can get a great career, a good paying job…." Yet, overall, he felt that the teachers and his high school did not play that big of a role. He did note that one teacher encouraged him to take honors classes in his junior year. However, he chose to discontinue taking these courses in 12th grade, so he could have an easier senior year.

Other participants also had mixed feelings about the knowledge they received in high school. John Smith, who did not take any honors classes in high school because he did not feel ready, most notable memory of discussions about college was the distinction his high school teachers made between high school and college. They compared high school to a playground and advised him to stay out of debt and avoid remedials classes once in college. He had been warned that in college he would have to do more for himself, but said he actually enjoyed the freedom college provided. Alfredo, who took honors classes in 11th grade, felt his high school did not do enough to disseminate information about college, college choice, and standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT. He recalled one in-class assignment that required him to create a vision board and choose three state colleges or universities he wanted to attend. He chose three random

colleges in Florida without knowing anything about them – one was chosen because the logo had a snake and "it looked pretty cool." Alfredo said he never received any feedback from the teacher on his selection of colleges. He summarized his high school's involvement in the college process as such:

> My high school pretty much did not go over the details when it came to college. They just kind of mentioned that college was the next step after high school and that as seniors, during my senior year, we should kind of…scout for the college or university you wanted to attend and then go to our advisors to help discuss how we get there. But they didn't really mention or give us any options. We didn't have anyone from the colleges or universities come out to speak to any of us.

He remembered only two high school staff members addressing going to college with him. One was a vocational instructor who encouraged him to take the ACT and the other was an athletic coach. He also received advice on college from the coordinator for the 5000 Role Models program, a mentorship program for minority males. He described both the coordinator and an athletic coach as "people who look like me." Alfredo further explained that the coach, who was from another country, learned how to adapt to inner city students and "really help steer a handful of us in the right direction."   Apart from these positive experiences, he did not feel that his high school did much to influence his decision to attend college:

> My high school didn't really play like the biggest role. I'd probably have to say there were a few role models in my high school…and there were a few figures in my high school who really showed me an alternative to my lifestyle, but they were ... they resembled me. So, they resembled me, but they showed me an alternative to what I had been taught because of my surroundings and my area.

John Smith who attended the same high school as Alfredo concurred about the lack of organized efforts to advise students about college.

Friends – Distancing myself from my best friend. The influence of friends was repeatedly mentioned in the participants' discussions about why they chose to pursue a postsecondary education. For Steve, it was not wanting to end up like his friends in high school who realized too late that they would not be graduating, thereby negating any immediate chance of going to college. Alfredo also mentioned having to distance himself from certain friends, including his best friend, who ridiculed his decision to attend college and accused him of hanging out with "lame (MASKED) college people" instead of them. This, he said, was a "huge indication, hey, I may be around the wrong people." Both Derek and John Smith said that friends played a positive role in their decision to attend college. John Smith's friend explained to him the rigor of college compared to high school and the need to be more of an adult. John Michael also credited his friends with encouraging him to take the ACT.

Self-motivation – "It was the curse that had to be broken". Except for John Michael who expressed some ambivalence about college, all of the participants were highly motivated to attend college. Yet, even he, was very self-directed once he started to attend, so much so that he completed his associate degree in two-years, which is not the norm at the college. John Smith explained that if his parents had not encouraged him to go to college, he would not have been satisfied if he had not attended. Derek phrased his intrinsic motivation in terms of going after something you want and wanting to be a role model for his family members. He was also determined to make a better life for himself. For Steve, wanting to attend college for himself was the biggest impetus. With his mom dead since he was six years old and what he described as a difficult upbringing by an aunt and uncle, he was his biggest motivator. He noted that once he reached 18

years of age, his uncle expected him to work and support himself, which was very difficult to do while still attending high school. However, he said he had no choice and worked two or three jobs to support himself. Steve said he soon realized that he was working hard for very little money and with what he called "the maturity of the mind" as he got older; he knew he did not want to continue working so hard for so little. "It's like this can't be me every day…. This is something I can't do every day honestly. I feel I have a lot of potential, a lot of things myself that can actually, you know. I feel – my worth, value is really high. Steve explained his intrinsic motivation this way:

> Growing up, it was…it was hard. Seeing certain struggles that my brother
> and sister had to go through. They didn't too much choose the right path
> and me on the other hand, it was like the curse had to be…it had to
> be…like broken….Staying with my aunt and uncle wasn't perfect at all,
> but I still managed to be able to finish school and because of what I seen
> and what I went through with them, that actually made me want to
> actually, you know, do better with myself. When it comes to my future
> kids, they don't have to see and experience the same thing.

Steve credited his tough upbringing and lack of "parental" support with forcing him to realize that the only person he can depend on was him. He thanked his "parents" for the lesson in being independent. Alfredo's self-motivation came from wanting to escape his immediate environs where drug selling, or being an entertainer, or athlete were the only alternatives discussed in his neighborhood after leaving high school. For him, college was a way to avoid a criminal lifestyle and pursue careers other than two stereotypical ones presented to him.

Preparation for College: Having the Necessary Capital

Academic capital – "The remedials held me back". Of the five students, four were confident of their academic preparedness for college. John Michael said that school had always been easy for him and all it took was "putting in the work." He confidently

added that he knew succeeding in college was going to be easy for him. He further noted

that he never felt overwhelmed at any time during the college process. Derek also felt

academically prepared for college, and attributed this to taking honors and dual

enrollment classes in high school. Steve also expressed feeling academically ready for

college, but noted that it was not only the responsibility of the high school to prepare you

for college, but also that of the student. He admitted that he was not always attentive in

high school and only started taking school seriously in 10th grade.

> [It's] hard if you do not pay attention…you have to graduate. And I seen
> some students like in 12th grade stressed out, having to make up so many
> classes. They didn't know how bad that was…. But I just managed to
> make it and I realized how important it was. When I got in 10th, that's
> when the whole U-turn took [place] and I was like on it.

Steve attributed this change in mindset to seeing other students wait too late to take their

academics seriously. He said he witnessed students in 11th and 12th grade crying when

they realized they would not receive their diplomas. Although he had to take a remedial

math class which delayed his entry into college-level math classes, John Smith still felt

academically prepared for college. While expressing disappointment at this fact, he

noted, "The remedials held me back, but I kind of knew that I would have to take at least

one remedial because I knew there were certain subjects that I didn't excel in." Math, he

acknowledged, was one of them. Alfredo, however, expressed ambivalence about his

preparation for college and noted that he was not the best nor was he the worst student

entering college. In spite of his earlier admission that his school had not formally

prepared him for college, he made As and Bs his first semester in college. However, like

one of the other participants, he felt the work in high school was dumbed down compared

to that in college. He spoke about how much more effort he had to put in while in college

to earn the same grades he received in high school. He also felt that the lack of rigor in

high school left him inadequately prepared for college:

> …High school work compared to college…[college] isn't so much
> dumbed down. It's more so that in high school, there was a lot more like ...
> teachers were a lot more lenient with the student. So, in high school, for
> example, I can put in, you know, not even 10, not even half the effort on
> an assignment, and I can still manage to get an A or a B on it. In college, I
> had to put in a lot more effort, even certain topics that interested me
> personally. I still had to study for them. So, it was like, I really had to
> apply myself a lot more in college versus high school. So, in terms of
> difficulty, certain topics and concepts were difficult to understand at first,
> but eventually I got them. So, it was pretty difficult, but it ... as far as like
> being a huge difference, it isn't entirely, like absolutely, different.

Sociocultural capital – "I wasn't really prepared for it [college]". In spite of

the innate desire to attend college and the support of family, college was an eye-opening

experience for most of the participants. Only John Michael who had visited a college

campus on a regular basis with his mother expressed no surprise at anything when he first

got to college. However, the other students lacked some of the basic understandings of

how college worked. Alfredo admitted that during his freshman year he wanted to drop

out of college because of how unprepared he felt:

> I wasn't really prepared for it in terms of like, the length, the among of
> work, the different subjects that we touched upon. I wasn't prepared for
> that bit of it, not at all. I thought college was more so what's portrayed on,
> you know, popular movies. You know, I wanted to varsity. I wanted a
> letterman jacket.

Alfredo also noted that he was caught off guard not only by the length of time it took to

get his degree, but also by the amount of time it took to study. He cited the ratio that for

every hour spent in class, he probably needed to spend two to three hours outside of the

class studying. In spite of the challenges, Alfredo did not drop out. He said he knew he

wanted more from life than the minimal salary he was earning while working part time.

"If I wanted a well-paying job, career, I'm going to have to work hard, and that's going to require me to pursue higher education, earn my degrees, so that I can be a valid candidate." Ultimately, it took Alfredo four years to complete his associate degree and not the two years he had expected based again on his limited knowledge about college. For Derek, college taught him how to better manage his time and better study habits, both of which, he confided, he lacked in high school.

For almost all of the students the financial aid process was troublesome. They found the application process confusing in terms of the wording and documentation required by the federal government and the college. Although Steve felt personally prepared for college, the financial aid process was more difficult for him than any of the other participants. His application was complicated by his status as a ward of the state and an independent student. However, with the support of a financial aid advisor he was able to navigate the process. He was eventually awarded financial aid, but with no understanding of the culture of college, he lost it. He admitted that initially he was not attending classes and subsequently failed some of his classes, resulting in the loss of his financial aid. Although he eventually regained his financial aid, Steve had to take one class at a time and pay out of pocket until it was reinstated.

The College Experience

Overall assessment of college experience – "I loved it! I loved every moment of it". The five students rated their overall experience with the college as positive. John Michael described his experience in positive terms and added that he did not have any complaints. He further explained that his professors were always there for him so it was a very supportive environment. Derek echoed John Smith's sentiments noting: "I loved

it! I loved every moment of it! I'm able to be engaged with students [while] also working on campus and also being able to achieve my academics all in one. It's been wonderful!" Steve was also effusive in his praise. He cited the hands-on experience with the professors and the assistance he received from financial aid personnel, the availability of tutors, and smaller class size for contributing to his overall positive experience at the college. John Smith described his overall experience in more mixed terms, but still rated his overall experience very positively:

> My experience, you know there have been some hard experiences, there's been some good experiences. Like I've been involved in clubs. I've been involved in like other activities the school's been doing, some field trips. You know, I met a lot of people, made some great connections. I would say overall like my time here at (MASKED) College wasn't a waste, because I was doing programs that I was genuinely interested [in] and I didn't waste my time in college.

Alfredo also felt very positive about his overall experience with the college and said he would give it a ten on a scale from one to ten with ten being the highest:

> That just means it's been outstanding, phenomenal. I've grown so much as an individual. I've gotten the chance to like, identify myself with certain causes and things. I found out so much about myself. I didn't know I enjoyed socializing as much …socializing in the sense of like, networking…. I didn't know I was so interested in like, being a leader, being such a positive example for my peers. So, (MASKED) college, mostly the campus in particular, really helped to foster wonderful traits and characteristics in me and get rid of a lot of bad habits as well.

A focus on the positive – "Certain professors showed me that I had the potential". While the descriptions of their overall experiences captured some of the good things about their college experience, the five students were asked to further expand on what made their time in college so positive. For John Michael it was specifically about the professors whom he felt "actually [cared] about what they were teaching and …actually [cared] about you learning it rather than you just getting a good grade." Steve

also credited the professors for his positive experiences at the campus, but noted his

personal determination as well:

> Certain professors showed me that I had the potential cause with me …the
> problem… I was getting to a point like I want to have a nervous
> breakdown. I mean it was just that one little piece of voice that really
> saying don't do it, please just don't do it. Do what you gotta do. You
> gonna make it.

Derek's positive experiences centered around his involvement on the campus. His

participation in numerous on-campus organizations such the Student Government

Association (SGA) gave him the opportunity to interact not only with students, but also

with college administrators and government officials. He explained these uncommon

experiences this way:

> I got engaged in a few organizations such as student government and it has
> allowed me to meet certain people in the college such as the college
> president, the vice president of the Board of Trustees…the college
> foundation, which has, you know, continuously reached out to me in
> certain events, to come out to certain events, and meet with certain people,
> and it has been a wonderful blessing.

Derek credited his involvement in the college for giving him a broader perspective on

college life and for teaching him how to interact with people. He explained that it has

also taught him how to get help and use that help to assist others. Like Derek, Alfredo

was also involved in various organization such as Student Learning, TRIO, and the

Student Government Association which gave him the opportunity to network. He also

attributed earning his first internship to his involvement in these organizations. This

involvement also gave him his first opportunity to travel outside the county and outside

the state. He was flabbergasted by the size of the state.

John Smith placed the relationships he built while in college amongst the positive

aspects of going to college. He explained that these "connections" would be able to "put

in good words for him" and assist him with recommendations. He further acknowledged that he learned a lot from his college classes, more so than he had in high school. He specifically mentioned a psychology class that taught him about life. "Like high school, I pretty much wasn't learning much, like we were just sitting there, but here we actually learned things from textbooks and everything and like the teachings. We actually learned here."

Challenges and barriers -Working and trying to be engaged. While acknowledging their positive experiences, the five students also spoke about the barriers or challenges they experienced. Some of these challenges were of an academic nature such as the one expressed my John Michael about doing things he did not want to do and taking classes outside of his forte. He stressed that he had to get through it because of what he wanted to achieve. Derek said his biggest challenge was trying to stay engaged in college while working and being so actively involved on campus. He felt this was made more difficult by the rigor involved with being a computer engineering. It [is] tough to wrap everything around it." At some point in their college journey, all of the participants worked, albeit mostly part time. However, while John Michael worked solely to gain experience, the others worked either to supplement the monies their families gave them for personal and school necessities as was the case with John Smith or to assist with the household expenses as was the case with both Alfredo and Derek. In Steve's case, he had been his own primary means of financial support since the age of 18 and was also expected to contribute to the household. All of the participants had to learn to balance the demands of work with the challenges of college.

Understanding how college works also proved challenging for some of the students. Derek mentioned not understanding how quickly a semester goes by; whereas, Steve expressed losing his financial aid because he did not understand how the system worked:

> I wasn't showing up to class and I lost my financial aid. I stopped and when I realized I had to pay for classes, which it was like $1800. It had to come out of pocket…. So that was really like, okay, I've an opportunity to get a free education and I'm playing around with it.

Steve explained that he regained his financial aid after passing his classes and now as an adult he had a different mindset. John Smith attributed his challenges to some professors who were unprofessional and did not care about what was going on in the class:

> The bad experiences, you know there were teachers here…. Like there are good teachers and there are bad teachers. There are some teachers here who are really unprofessional and some of them just don't care about like what's going on in class. Whether you're trying your hardest to pass, but they're making it hard for you…. [I]t's really hard for us to like really deal with that because we can get in trouble for that because there's like a student conduct. When you're trying your hardest to pass, but they're making it hard for you.

He also complained about the power professors had to dictate his success. He noted that teachers sometimes seem to fail students and referred to a specific instance (at a different campus) when a professor seemingly at the last minute did not assist his students with a problem as promised. He deemed these types of professors as "unprofessional and rude." He further noted: "I would say, of course teachers are important for college, but it's about having the right teacher with the attitude to help you out. There are certain teachers here who don't belong here personally." Steve also mentioned his challenges with professors; especially those of a different race who prejudged Black students and did not think they had the academic acumen for college. He detailed an incident with a writing professor

who was in awe of how quickly he mastered something she taught and later questioned if

an essay he wrote was his because he had completed it well in a short space of time. He

saw this experience as an extension of life for Black men, in general, and spoke about

also not being affirmed for learning things quickly on his job. Alfredo also felt that some

of his negative interactions with faculty had to do with him being Black. He spoke of an

incident that happened at the same college, but at a different campus, where he was one

of only a few Black students in a class. He felt that the professor did not want to work

with him. He described going to the professor's office on multiple occasions during

designated office hours seeking help, but not receiving any assistance even when there

were no other students there. Alfredo felt this incident had to do with his race. "I did

notice that the Hispanic students got far more help when it came to like, after hours than I

did. And I felt like had I not improved my studying habits that I would've probably

failed that class."

Derek also felt that some of his challenges were related to race, but in a different

way than Alfredo. Derek explained that as a computer engineering major, he was one of

the few Blacks in his some of his classes. He felt the stress of being "underrepresented"

in the classroom and in his major while trying to make connections with his classmates as

well as trying to understand the material. This was exacerbated by his innate desire to

excel.

Each student had a different way of dealing with the challenges. Steve chose to

buckle down and pass his classes, so he could regain his financial aid. He also chose to

prove professors and others wrong when they did not believe in him. Alfredo specifically

mentioned relying on his own "mental strength," but also mentioned spending long hours

getting counseling from close peers and his advisor in TRIO. For all of these students, their success can be attributed to their personal strength, but also to those who helped to facilitate their success including professors and other college personnel.

Facilitators of Success

   Professors, staff and campus resources – "There were some good professors".
Repeatedly, participants in the study expressed the importance of professors and staff to their success in college. John Michael said that being more involved with the professors helped and that he found them very "helpful and supportive." Derek said his professors definitely helped him the most and spoke of meeting with the professors during their office hours. He also mentioned how they encouraged him to come to them for help, especially when he did not understand the material. "They pushed like so much for me that I could come into the office …and then they sat down with me and just broke it down and just showed it and we worked it out." John Smith concurred with John Michael about the importance of professors to his success:

> There were some good professors here I met in the beginning, which left a great impression on me. And they were, unfortunately they weren't core teachers here…They mainly taught at other universities…. And it's like with the example from those teachers, I hope to encounter more teachers like that.

Steve also referenced the importance of having Black professors. He mentioned a Black, female professor who mentored him and spoke to him about their shared race, telling him, "You know we are the same color." Steve explained that being of the same race did not make her easier on him, but actually made her harder on him since as he put it, a lot of Black males do not make it in school and in life.

Facilitators of these students' success also came from other campus personnel. Alfredo mentioned his TRIO academic advisor who would sit down with him and "pretty much just let me get every issue I had on chest off, so that I could feel a sense of relief." He also acknowledged the assistance he received from the SGA advisor and the advisor from the Student Learning Department. He referred to these women as his moms and spoke highly of them:

> You know, I had that many moms, like four moms. She [the TRIO advisor], we had a student-professor, student-advisor relationship. So, everything, when it came to college, community college, how it works, what to do, she played the biggest role and really helped to equip me. Dr. (MASKED) was my Student Government advisor. She really helped me to kind of set the example for me.

Steve found his greatest support on campus from a financial aid advisor who was extremely helpful after he lost his aid and who helped him navigate college in general, not just financial aid matters:

> She would let me know, look, take this class cause I know for a fact it would be just enough for you to be able to help you get financial aid. And once I got back my financial aid, she let me know, okay, now take this teacher cause they will actually help, benefit you, because you work. You actually work and they actually accommodate students there that work.

All five participants also talked about the importance of utilizing on-campus resources such as tutoring. Derek, who found studying hard, went to tutoring to better himself academically. Steve recommended taking advantage of "everything on campus." Alfredo reiterated their advice and gave a litany of all the resources he used on campus including tutoring, the academic advisement department, and a lab dedicated solely for STEM majors.

Family, friends, and the importance of self-reliance – "Just trying to push through the challenges that I face". For many of the participants, college held many surprises and most of them were not adequately prepared for the rigor or the changes from high school. They soon recognized that it took a team of people to be successful and a lot of self-reliance. John Michael had the unique experience of having a mother who worked in higher education, so she was consistently mentioned as a resource that helped him through the college processes. However, this did not preclude him from relying on peers and friends, both the ones he made since starting college and some he knew from his former high school who "made it easier for him to come every day and have like motivation to come to college and learn." Steve, who lost his mother at the age six, spoke of the difficult upbringing he had being raised by his aunt and uncle. However, he acknowledged that his family, who once thought he would never achieve much, now saw him in a different light. Although his family had not been of direct assistance, their indifferent behavior pushed him to do better in college. Steve also mentioned wanting to be a positive role model for his brothers and sisters who now knew it was possible to rise above people's low expectations of you. "So, they really thought we were gonna be a downfall and, me, from what I hear now, I'm basically the talk of the family now." Steve also had the support of friends:

> I have good friends. And they tell me, they know my background and history, everything I went through…. And friends on, that's on campus they tell me like, look, you keep it up …. The main thing that they say is you don't have no mom; you don't have no dad and then you like keep afloat. You still managing to go to school, so it's not like you don't have it. It's in you. And that's the only thing that really actually motivated me. And they see that this, that everything I've done been through and I still keep a smile on my face. I still come.

Derek attributed his success and remaining in college to his own "persistence" and seeing the bright side of things. He said of his determination to continue, "That's something that is key for me, just trying to push through any challenges that I face." He also credited his optimistic outlook and refusal to dwell on the negative as reasons for his success. For John Smith, his personal determination was also vital to his continuing in school as well as his commitment to his success. He recalled the times when he did not feel like coming to school, but refused to give up.

From one Black man to another. Having completed multiple semesters at the college or in the case of Alfredo and John Smith having completed their associate degree, the participants in the study had advice for other Black males in college. Alfredo spoke of some Black male students hiding their honesty in two ways. First, hiding how smart they are. Second, hiding that they need help:

> A lot of young Black men in particular, in my case at least, I noticed are extremely intelligent. They're really, really smart. However, depending on where they grow up, it's frowned upon to be the intellectual, to be smart. It's like, no, become an entertainer, or become an athlete. The second would one would be to be honest. Be absolutely honest…. Being honest about hardships, being honest about challenges.

Alfredo attributed this lack of honesty about their needs to Black men having too much pride which he deemed a "false sense of pride" and "foolish pride." His advice to Black male students is to be honest about themselves and not be embarrassed if they need help. He also recommended choosing their major based on something they like:

> I'm Caribbean….We jokingly say that in the Caribbean culture… that if you go to college, you have to become a doctor or a lawyer….We jokingly said it, but like, if my niche, if I'm not interested by the medical field, I shouldn't be forcing myself to do that. So, find your niche.

He also advised Black men attending the community college to use the two years to establish the foundation of their futures. He noted that the institutions are helpful to those who may be working part time or already have children. He described the community college as a "viable resource in your backyard" and advised others to take advantage of what it had to offer.

Steve's practical advice to Black male students was to ensure they had the financial means to pay for college as well as the ambition. Noting that Black men already had "a strike against them" such as being profiled when they walk into a store, his advice was to be around people who are supportive and who share the same goals. John Smith's advice was to stay in school, the same message of persistence given by Derek.

Vignette

Composite narratives or vignettes are often used in research to present one story based on the data collected from more than all the interviews (Willis, 2018). The following vignette encapsulates the researcher's interpretation of the lived experiences of the five research participants. Corey's story is a compilation of the experiences of the five participants and their efforts to persist.

Corey's story

The fall following his graduation from high school, 18-year-old Corey chose to attend a community college close to home. Its proximity to his house was a selling point, but also its accessibility and affordability. His high school GPA and ACT scores were not terrible, but he knew they were not stellar. Corey knew he wanted a college education to better himself economically and socially. He also wanted to pave the way for a better life

for his family, especially his siblings. However, he did not have the financial resources to go directly to a four-year university.

Looking back at his high school days with the value of hindsight, Corey wished that his high school had done more to inform him about college in a more systematic way. His teachers did mention college to his class and a counselor did encourage him to take the standardized tests necessary to gain entrance to university. However, he wished there had been a more concerted effort to disseminate the information in a structured fashion. While other high schools had college fairs, his high school never invited any colleges or universities to visit. He also had himself to blame and acknowledged that he could have done more to prepare for college. He had chosen not to take honors classes in his senior year because he wanted his last year in high school to be relaxed. However, he had still done well his senior year having seen the heartache of friends and peers who did not successfully complete 12th grade. He graduated high school on time.

With the encouragement of family and some of his friends plus an innate desire to better himself, he had easily completed the college application and enrolled as a college student. He completed the financial aid application, although difficult, with the help of the college's financial aid office. Based on his parent's income, he qualified for the Pell grant, which meant he would not have to pay back the money once he had completed his degree. His goal was to complete an associate degree at the community college and then transfer to a four-year university to complete a Bachelor's degree.

This, however, proved easier said than done. College held quite a few surprises for Corey and was nothing like it was portrayed in the movies. Corey had to learn how to better manage his time while both working and going to school. He also had to learn

how to study effectively since college was more rigorous than high school. It had been much easier in high school to earn good grades. Corey eventually got involved in a number of organizations on campus and signed up for the TRIO program – a federally sponsored program that provides services for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. He credited the TRIO advisor with helping him navigate the challenges of attending college. She also became like a mom to him – someone he could talk to about both school and life. His involvement in TRIO also allowed him to travel throughout the state, something he could not have afforded to do on his own.

With the help of TRIO, family, concerned faculty, and friends, Corey persisted. He had overcome many challenges including having to work to assist himself and his family and having a professor whom he felt treated him differently because he was Black. Conversely, he had also received invaluable help from other professors and staff at the college. Corey also strongly believed that it was his fortitude and desire to better himself socially and economically that had pushed him to persist.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Black men attend community colleges to improve their socioeconomic standing and that of their families (Wang, Winkle-Wagner, Sun, & Gaskew, 2018; Wood & Williams, 2013). The participants in this qualitative study were no exception. The five men, each at various junctures in their education at the same campus of a large, urban community college, shared their lived experiences before and after enrolling through face-to-face and follow-up phone interviews. In addition to the purpose, rationale, and significance of this study, this chapter provides a summary of findings and analyses of their consistencies and inconsistencies with relevant theories and literature on Black men in college, especially the community college. Implications for practice in secondary and postsecondary education are discussed, as well as policy implications at the institutional, community, and state levels. Limitations of the study are also discussed along with recommendations for future research.

The Current Study

Purpose of the study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the factors that influence the persistence of Black male students who attend community colleges. Although the study explored and acknowledged the barriers Black males face in pursuit of education at these two-year institutions, it also used an "anti-deficit" approach to help shed light on factors that contributed to their persistence.

Rationale for the study. While research on the persistence of Black male students who attend four-year universities and colleges has increased in the past decades, the dearth of research on their success at two-year institutions continues (Harris & Wood, 2013; Ingram & Coaxum, 2018; Strayhorn, 2012b; Wood & Williams, 2013). As

Williams and Coaxum (2018) noted, "the plight of Black men in community colleges has been understudied, under theorized, and overlooked by educators, reformers, and policymakers…." (p. 68). Furthermore, there is little research on the success of these collegians in primarily Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs). There is also an overreliance on secondary data to understand this population, which limits the variables a researcher can use to study this population (Strayhorn, 2012b). To address these gaps, the current study was conducted at the campus of a large urban HSI, and a phenomenology approach was used to gather the participants' firsthand experiences. Ultimately, the current study sought to ascertain the factors that lead Black males to persist in the community college.

Significance of the study. The majority of Black men seeking a college education choose to do so at community colleges and as Williams and Coaxum (2018) explained, research suggests that these two-year institutions are the "first and last effort for Black men to secure economic, political, and social mobility" (pp. 67-68). However, the data on their persistence to completion are troubling. Wood and Williams (2013) cited a 2009 report from the U.S. Department of Education which indicated that 11.5% of Black male students will leave a community college within one year of enrollment; 48.9% will leave after three years; and 83% will leave after six years without attaining any credentials. The current study also has wider societal significance. Scholars have compared the societal and economic inequities faced by Black men to a "viral epidemic" (Jordan & Rideaux, 2018, p. 41) with widespread ramifications that affect their employment, health, and incarceration rates. Empirical findings have shown a correlation between achieving higher education credentials and improvement in these negative indicators for Black men. "Higher earnings, lower unemployment and incarceration

rates, and greater longevity are all corollaries of educational attainment" (Jordan & Rideaux, 2018, p. 41).

Research questions. Two major research questions and one exploratory question guided this qualitative study. First, what were Black male students' perceptions of the factors that led them to pursue an education in a community college? Second, what were Black male students' perceptions of the factors that helped facilitate their persistence in a community college? These two questions sought to ascertain the lived experiences (personal, familial, institutional, cultural, and societal) of Black males' before and after attending college. Third, based on these experiences, what recommendations did these students have for their counterparts about succeeding at the community college?

Summary of Findings

The results of this study revealed a complex set of influences on the decision of Black males to attend college and stay enrolled. The influences begin well before the decision to attend college. The participants' high schools, friends, families, and home environments all affected their initial thoughts of attending college and their final decision to do so. Once they enrolled, most of these pre-college influences continued to affect their success, but were now compounded with institutional factors such as the participants' interaction with faculty as well as unfamiliarity with the college system. This lack of understanding, which is also referred to as a lack of capital, was evident in almost all participants; it contributed to one participant's loss of financial aid and to another's thoughts of dropping out. Another notable finding was that participants had similar racial experiences at the Hispanic serving institution (HSI) to Black men attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Yet, all the participants persisted,

exhibiting great tenacity and fortitude. Furthermore, all of them exhibited high educational aspirations, which is said to be higher in Black students than White students. Although this aspiration is said to wane over time, similar to the students in Wang, et al.'s (2t018), participants' educational aspiration remained the same from when they had started college. In some cases, it was even stronger.

Seven major themes emerged from the interviews with the students:1) the importance of going to college and the impetus to go to college; 2) who or what influenced them to attend college and why they finally chose to attend; 3) how prepared they were for college; 4) positive experiences while attending college; 5) the challenges and barriers to their success in college; 6) facilitators of their success once in college; and 7) recommendations for Black male students based on their experiences. These themes were classified into two broad categories, participants' pre-college and in-college experiences, in order to provide a more in-depth view of the totality of their postsecondary journey. Participants realized that the intent to attend college was not the same as being prepared to attend. Without varying levels of academic preparation and sociocultural capital, many study participants reported making missteps in college that frustrated them and almost kept some from continuing. However, they all persisted.

Precollege experiences. Before even setting foot on a college campus, the study participants had experienced many factors—personal, familial, cultural and societal—that influenced their decision to attend college. The first research question sought to ascertain the precollege factors that influenced the participants' decision to apply to and attend college. Since Black men choose to attend community colleges more so than any other institution type, there was also question during the interviews about college choice.

Impetus. A common impetus for the participants to attend college was the desire to better themselves. The consensus was that attending college would have a panacea-like effect on their lives; even the one student who did not see college as the "only way" to achieve success held this view. Participants in the study unanimously believed that college would lead to upward mobility and improve their socioeconomic standing, which, for some, meant escaping the "ghetto", not having to work as hard as they had been, and creating a viable alternative to selling drugs. They also said that key factors in their choice to attend the community college were proximity and affordability. All of them lived in the vicinity of the college, and four of them had attended high schools close to college. The participants also noted that the two-year institution was much cheaper than a four-year university, which none of them felt they or their families could afford. One student expressed his choice in terms of giving college a chance at a cheaper institution in case he was not successful. If he failed, he would not have expended his finances.

Family. Of the five participants, only one had a parent who had attained a college degree. Whether directly or indirectly, family played a crucial role in the students' decision to attend college. Direct family involvement ranged from setting expectations early that the student would attend college to providing financial information so the student could apply for federal aid. This involvement occurred even in the family in which a parent would have preferred the student to work to assist the family rather than attend college. Although one student's family was not involved at all, the lack of interest served to push him to attend college with the expectation that it was the path to upward mobility. For those participants who had younger siblings, wanting to be a role model for them or to be able to give them a better life also affected their decision to attend college.

Friends. Although not as influential as family for the five participants, friends contributed to their desire to go to college. For some, it was because of their positive encouragement and for others because their negative behaviors served as deterrents. One student changed his academic trajectory in high school after witnessing the dismay of friends who had failed. Another spoke of dismissing the taunts of friends, including a best friend, for associating with new friends who were attending college.

Fortitude. So great was their desire to better themselves, that none of the participants was deterred by their pre-college experiences. For many of these first-generation students this meant overcoming barriers, such as uninterested teachers and the limited knowledge of their parents about the college system. One student, who had been working to support himself once he turned 18 years old, made it to college with basically no assistance from family.

High school. Although high schools are expected to serve a crucial role in the transition to college, most participants felt the college preparatory information they received ranged from inadequate to virtually nonexistent. While individual stories differed, most participants noted that school personnel did not adequately prepare them for college. Discussions on college were couched in generalities such as college being "a right and not a privilege." Without the assistance of an athletic coach and a role model from a mentoring program, one student would not have received any pertinent information about college. He said that in his only in-class discussion about college, students were required to choose three in-state colleges they wanted to attend. Having no prior knowledge of college, he made his choice based on the "cool" logos. On the positive side, one of the students had been encouraged by his teachers to take dual

enrollment classes, and all but one of the participants had been advised to take at least one year of honors classes and either the SAT or ACT. What was problematic about these recommendations is that, once again, the information was not disseminated in an organized fashion, but by individual teachers and mentors. At some high school, seniors either meet individually or in groups with counselors for the sole purpose of preparing them for college. Therefore, college preparation is not left to the discretion of individual teachers or mentors. Only two participants felt adequately informed about college. One had attended a local charter school and the other went to a high school outside the area. The other three participants attended the two local public schools in the college environs.

College experiences: facilitators of success. Once in college, the convergence of pre-college experiences and those in college impacted participants' initial adjustment and subsequent success. Guided by the second research question on the factors that facilitate the persistence of Black men once enrolled, the findings indicated that their success hinged on their academic and sociocultural preparedness before college as well as their interrelated experiences once in college. These included their relationships with professors and staff, involvements on campus, and determination to succeed.

Preparation for college: academic and sociocultural capital. Buoyed by an intense desire to improve their lives and a belief that they could succeed, the participants entered college with high expectations. However, the dissonance between intent and reality resulted in difficulties for those students who lacked the academic and sociocultural capital often apparent in majority students or their counterparts who attend four-year institutions. Although one student has to take a remedial math class and other struggled with the rigor of college, overall the participants felt they were adequately

prepared academically for college. For most of the students is what their lack of sociocultural capital, the innerworkings of college, that was the most difficult. Only one student, whose mother worked at a two-year institution and had a master's degree, said that college held no surprises. Collectively, the other participants lacked time management and study skills, did not understand the inner workings of financial aid, and one even entertained thoughts of dropping out. However, in spite of the daunting experience for most students, they all persisted. Two have already earned associate degrees: one had returned to pursue a second associate degree and the other planned to attend a state university in Florida. The other three were still enrolled at the college.

On-campus facilitators. Study participants relied on a diverse group of people to navigate college. While family and friends were still important components in their lives, once students were on campus, faculty played a major role in facilitating their success. Even students who mentioned negative interactions with faculty also mentioned the positive influence other faculty members had on their success. However, those negative interactions troubled the students. Some participants benefited from surrogate advisors and unofficial mentors who had other positions on the campus. Others relied heavily on assigned advisors in the organizations in which they were involved, such as the Student Government Association (SGA) and TRIO. Resiliency, determination, and fortitude were also identifiable factors in the success of these Black male students. The following sections provide more details on the on-campus facilitators of success for these students.

Faculty. In general, students had positive experiences at the college, but they also shared negative experiences, and most were related to interactions with faculty. Without exception, the participants all mentioned the important role faculty played in their

journey through college and attributed their success, in part, to some professors. This support was tangible; students recounted experiences with faculty who assisted them academically after class. The support also was intangible. One participant noted that a professor believed in his ability when he himself did not; the student said it was a Black professor whom, he felt, mentored him because he was also Black. Participants also attributed some of their negative experiences with faculty to race. One student mentioned being accused of plagiarism when a professor did not believe he had done such excellent work in a short space of time. Another participant spoke of the blatant discrimination he felt while attending classes at another campus. He noted that he was one of only a few Blacks in the class where most students were Hispanic. He felt the Black students were treated differently and did not receive the same level of assistance as the Hispanic students, specifically noting that he was kept waiting outside one professor's office when there were no students in his office. He felt that the Hispanic students received much more help after class than he did; therefore, he had to improve his study skills to pass the class.

Mentors and masculinity. Just as students found assistance from staff other than teachers during high school, the same was true of college. Their mixed experiences with faculty were mitigated by experiences with other college personnel. There were unofficial mentors, such as the financial aid advisor who not only assisted a student with regaining his financial aid, but also in choosing the professors who would understand his personal problems and their impact on his work. Being actively involved in on-campus programs and organizations also led some students to receive official mentoring. One student mentioned a TRIO advisor who spent hours counseling him on both academic

and personal issues. Another participant attributed his success to the counseling he received from the SGA advisor at the campus. Both students acknowledged that their participation in these activities not only helped them academically, but also socially since they were provided the opportunity to travel throughout the state and to meet important college and community representatives. In addition to these sources of assistance, students acknowledged the importance of seeking other resources, which included tutoring and academic advisement.

Participants in the study did not exhibit any reluctance to seek help when needed as is often evident in the displaced masculinity displayed by some Black male students in colleges and universities. The five males readily discussed the assistance they received prior to college and identified without hesitation those who provided them with help once in college. One participant encouraged his fellow collegians to put their pride aside and acknowledge when they needed help. Black men are often socialized to believe that it is their ultimate and sole responsibility to look after their dependent. They will often leave college to do so (Wood, 2014) or juggle work and school to provide for their families, which negatively impacts their academics. Again, study participants did not exhibit any of these behaviors. The oldest participant was 23 years old, which is four years younger than the average Black male attending the community college. None of them had immediate dependents; although two students used their money to help support their families. These two factors could be responsible for the difference in their sense of masculinity.

Other facilitators: family, friends, and fortitude. The influence of family and friends does not end once students start college. Current study results indicated that

family involvement, or the lack of it, directly affected student persistence, though it was not as evident as in high school. For one first-generation student whose parents had expected him to work to support the family after high school, it was about making his immigrant parents proud. Another student who had received no support from his surrogate parents took pride in the fact that he had persisted while he had been expected to fail, and that the naysayers in his family were now proud of him. Again, the tenacity demonstrated by this student was prevalent throughout the study's findings. The participants demonstrated tremendous fortitude and self-determination as they battled to overcome barriers such as indifferent professors and the lack of knowledge about how college works. There was also a reliance on friends, especially those on campus. Participants emulated friends who had already graduated or were persisting, and they looked to friends for encouragement when they felt discouraged.

Commonality of experiences at PWIs and HSIs. The experiences of participants at the research site with a predominantly Hispanic population were similar to those of Black males attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs). The lack of structural diversity at PWIs in terms of the low enrollment of Black men impacts campus climate. Less than 20% of the student body at the campus is Black and close to 70% is Hispanic. Similar to Black men at PWIs, study participants were also confronted with racial microaggressions and stereotypes (Beatty & McElderry, 2018; Harper, 2015). One participant spoke about a professor of a different race who seemed to insinuate that he was not the author of an assignment because he had mastered the information in a short space of time. He felt this was a reference to him not being smart because of his race. Another participant talked about the preferential treatment a Hispanic professor showed

to his Hispanic students when compared to the Black students. Black males at PWIs often have issues with feeling like they do not belong (Harper, 2015; Strayhorn, et al. 2015). This feeling of being out of place was felt acutely by the computer engineering student who mentioned the shortage of Black students in his classes. However, his overall sense of belonging on the campus was positive, which could be attributed to his active involvement in various organizations.

In sum, Black men in the current study faced obstacles to their persistence both before and after they started college. Their readiness for college was dependent on where they attended high school as well as their parents' understanding of the college system and/or willingness to help. Yet with the help of the right resources, including professors, mentors, family, and friends, they overcame these barriers. Their desire to come to college and their ultimate success also depended on their innate desire to better themselves. Even when faced with racism and stereotypes, participants remained resilient and persisted.

Linking Study Findings to Theory and Research

The results of this study provided empirical evidence for the linkage of familial, societal, cultural, and personal factors to the persistence of Black men in the community college setting. In so doing, these research findings align with traditional student theories on the factors that impact student success, such as Bronfenbrenner's (1993) ecological theory on the role of the environment (family, school, friends, etc.) in student success, and Rendon's (1994) Validation Theory, which posited that minority students need more reassurance of their ability than their White counterparts. The findings were also in keeping with some of the newer theories and research focused specifically on Black

males in higher education, such as Strayhorn's (2012a) analysis that a sense of belonging was a crucial factor in their persistence. Current research findings were also consistent with Wood and Harris' research (as cited in Harris & Wood, 2013) on the non-cognitive domain which recognized the complex interaction of a sense of belonging, race, ethnicity and gender in the persistence of Black male students. The domain also captures how Black males perceive masculinity (Harris & Wood, 2013). The following sections discuss in more detail the linkage between current study findings and applicable theories as well as extant research findings.

The environment. Current study findings indicating the impact of family, school, socioeconomic status, and societal constructs such as racism on the participants' success are in keeping with the tenets of Bronfenbrenner's (1993) Theory of Developmental Ecology. Bronfenbrenner proffered that the environments in which humans live and interact impact all human development. Like rings around Saturn, these environs encircle the student, impact every aspect of his life, and include intimate relationships such as family, teachers, and friends, which, as the study findings indicated, played a significant role in the students' decisions to attend college and to persist in college. All the participants' stories emphasized the importance of family to varying extents, so much so, that even an unsupportive family acted as a catalyst for one of the participants to do better. Renn and Arnold (2003) extended these intimate relationships, or microsystem, to include student organizations, which the current research also showed positively influenced the success of at least two of the students.

Each participant also exhibited behaviors consistent with what Bronfenbrenner (1993) referred to as the mesosystem, which shows the interaction of the variables

(family, friends, teachers, etc.) within the microsystem. This was especially evident in the influence friends had on the current study participants' behaviors, from emulating friends' bad behavior to emulating friends' positive behavior as well as following them to college. Each participant's choice to attend a community college because of its affordability is explained by the exosystem layer of their environment, of which college policies and procedures and the family's economic status are a part (Bronfenbrenner's, 1993). Had these students had the economic means, and if the admission policies at four-year institutions were different, their college choice options may have been wider.

The last system in Bronfenbrenner's (1993) theory with relevance to current research findings was the macrosystem, which includes the broader political, social, and cultural contexts of the participants' lives, including the construct of race. Race was mentioned by one student in terms of the underrepresentation of Blacks in his classes, which left him feeling apart from others in the class. Another participant had a more global perspective and spoke of the general struggle of the Black man to survive on and off campus. However, one participant alleged blatant racism on the part of a professor whom he felt treated Hispanic students differently from Black students by giving more credence and attention to their requests for help.

Race, masculine identity, and sense of belonging. The intersectionality of race and gender was salient in participants accounts for the racism they experienced on campus, which affected their sense of belonging at the college. Race also became a focal point in the research when participants were asked what advice they would give to Black men before and after entering college. Their advice ranged from general encouragement to urging others to be persistent to more explicit instructions on being honest about their

needs. One participant felt that Black men's egos prohibited them from admitting that they needed help academically as well as financially. The latter finding is consistent with Harris and Wood's (2013) research on identity and masculinity in Black men. The researchers explained that a displaced sense of masculinity in these students made them unwilling to seek personal, financial, or academic help. Instead, masculinity was equated with independence and vigor.

Participants in the study also felt the need to feel connected to the institution, to be socially supported on campus, and to be valued and respected. This was in keeping with Strayhorn's (2012a) theory that Black males need to feel like they belong on college campuses and Rendon's (1994) Validation Theory, which explains that non-traditional students needed more reassurance or validation than their traditional counterparts. Rendon (1994) recommended that these students get involved in campus life to build their self-esteem, and this was reflected in the current study. Two of the most successful participants were actively involved in multiple organizations on campus and attributed their success to their involvement.

However, one finding that was inconsistent with Rendon's theory regarding nontraditional students' lack of confidence was that the current study participants exhibited tremendous self-confidence. At times, one participant felt overwhelmed with his chosen major, another felt like dropping out, and a third felt emotionally drained, but none expressed a lack of confidence. Four of the participants fit the description of the nontraditional student. They lacked the money (economic capital) to pay for school, the prior knowledge about college (cultural capital) and a network of friends and family who could serve as resources (social capital) (Bourdieu, 1986; Patton, et al., 2016).

Deficits and alternative capital. However, these deficits did not deter these students from persisting or completing. The ant-deficit achievement framework proposed by Harper (2010, 2012) advocates that the alternative capital such students bring to the table be considered. Others such as Brooms (2016), Strayhorn (2012b), Wang et al. (2018) also acknowledged that minority students bring alternative cultural assets that are often overlooked since they are not from the ruling class. Strayhorn (2012b) said Black men inherited different forms of cultural capital rooted in their community and a sense of caring for others. He noted, however, that to succeed these students must master the sociocultural capital of the prestige class, which at times can seem like an additional course they have to master. Participants in the study did express their care for others, most noticeably their siblings and parents. One of the primary reasons many of them gave for attending college was to improve the socioeconomic status of their families. As one student noted, it was a way out of the "ghetto." Some were also concerned about the well-being and success of their friends.

However, none of the participants expressed any strong cultural ties to their community or expressed receiving assistance from their community. When asked who other than family or friends assisted them before starting college and after their enrollment, there was no mention of church or the other cultural pillars in the Black community. All of the participants were in their early 20s making them Generation Zs according to Seemiller and Grace's (2016) classification. Generation Z is currently the most racially diverse generation in the United States with only 55% identified as White. On track to be the last generation in which Whites are the majority, collectively Generation Z is said to have a positive outlook on diversity in the United States

(Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Whether this antithetical finding from previous research can be attributed to generational change is worthy of further research.

Some researchers have concluded that the aspirational capital many Black men bring to college diminished over time. However, Wang et al. (2018) found evidence to the contrary and noted that some Black collegians educational aspirations actually increased.   The latter finding was consistent with the current research findings. In spite of the barriers, all the participants persisted even when faced with challenges such as racism, losing financial aid, and not fully understanding the rigor of college. The desire to better themselves and their families was also a strong force.

Persistence: empirical findings. While theories abound that can provide perspective on Black men's persistence in college, empirical research into this phenomenon is relatively new, especially as it pertains to the community college. Current study findings regarding Black male persistence can be placed in three large categories: pre-college factors, deficits, and institutional factors that impact persistence.

Pre-college factors. Age is often cited as a factor in the persistence of Black males in the community college. Since many of these students are older, they often have more work and family obligations (Harris & Wood, 2013; Strayhorn, 2012b; Wood, 2014; Wood & Williams, 2013). Using data from the 2003-2004 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Wood (2014) noted that Black men were more likely than other men to leave college during the first year for personal reasons. This finding was not supported by current study results, as all the participants had persisted in spite of their personal obligations. Of the five students, four of them worked part time to supplement the financial support they received from their families. Of these

four, three also assisted their households financially. One of the three had been almost solely supporting himself since the age of 18. Two of the participants were also active in many on-campus organizations, which also monopolized their time. This inconsistency could stem from the fact that the current participants were in their early 20s, younger than the average age of Black men in community colleges, which is 27.7 years old (Harris & Wood, 2013; Wood, 2014). However, the findings were consistent with Hagedorn et al. (2001-2002) research, which found that younger Black males were more likely to persist and emphasized that age may not be the variable determining persistence, but rather the responsibilities that increased as students got older.

Deficits. As previously mentioned, deficit theories involving students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds precipitated research on its applicability to Black college students. Based on these deficit models, research indicated that Black men were usually academically unprepared for college, especially those who had attended urban high schools (Arnold & Barratt, 2015; Bush & Bush, 2012). This often stemmed from the lack of rigorous high school classes and reduced opportunities to take advanced placement (AP) courses (Strayhorn, 2012a). However, in spite of the inadequate preparation some of the students had received in high school, only one felt somewhat academically unprepared for college. The student who had to take a remedial math class attributed it more to his weakness in that subject, than overall academic unpreparedness.

The literature is also replete with findings that indicate Black collegians lack the social and cultural capital delineated in Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction (Strayhorn, 2012b). Social capital is accrued by having parents, friends, or family members who have attended college and can share that knowledge; cultural capital refers

to the skill set usually accrued in the homes of more prosperous families that includes

behaviors relating to etiquette (Arnold & Barratt, 2015). Again, the lived experience of

current study participants reflected these research findings. One student who had a parent

with a master's degree and who worked at the college expressed the least surprise about

college once he got there. The others expressed surprise and shock at the length of a

semester, the inner workings of financial aid, and even the process of dropping a class

without being penalized. These college transition issues were mentioned by Harper and

Newman (2016) who found that Black males with prior social and academic capital had a

smoother transition and easier adjustments to college. However, researchers such as

Harper (2010, 2012, 2015) are critical of such deficit-focused studies and have conducted

new research on the factors that contribute to Black men's success in college rather than

their failure. The lived experiences shared by the students in this study supported

Harper's contention that it is important to look for alternative capital, which in these

participants included passion, fortitude, and a determination to better their lives. The

participants also had high educational aspirations.

Institutional factors. Strayhorn (2012b) argued that background characteristics

of Black male students in the community college setting are integral to their success.

However, he asserted that what is even more important are the policies, procedures, and

resources offered by the institution. One key institutional factor in Black student success

is faculty (Wood, 2014; Wood & Ireland, 2014). Repeatedly, studies have shown that

positive interaction, especially informal meetings between Black male students and

faculty, is a key factor in their persistence (Wood, 2014). Wood (2014) cited research

showing that Black male collegians who had informal interactions with faculty were

184% more likely to persist. Consistently in this current study, the five participants spoke of the invaluable assistance they received from supportive faculty who helped them when they needed it. However, three participants also reported having negative interactions with faculty, which two of them felt occurred because they were Black.

Providing resources: tangible and intangible. As previously discussed, Black men often come to college without some of the vital capital they need. Therefore, the two-year institutions that accept them through open-access admission policies have a responsibility to provide needed resources. In the tangible sense, researchers cited the need for counseling services and tutoring and students in the current study regarded the tutoring they received and the counseling, whether formal or informal, as invaluable to their success. In the intangible sense, researchers also cited the need for institutions to create welcoming campus environments, which is important to students' sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012b). These findings were reflected in the stories of current study participants. As one participant noted that from the moment he came to campus, he felt at home. Others expressed similar sentiments, which lent credence to the empirical research.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this phenomenological research study have widespread implications for higher education stakeholders, especially in the community college. Colleges do not exist in isolation, but are part of a complex ecosystem (McNair, Albertine, Cooper, McDonald, & Major, 2016) whose inner workings and collaborative efforts influence student success. The findings of this study have implications for all the stakeholders in the ecosystem: the families, high schools, faculty, staff, and college

administrators, as well as the community within which these entities exist. Furthermore, there are implications for the state policymakers who are responsible for regulating these institutions. The connectivity and shared responsibility for student success placed on all of these stakeholders are even more vital in the community college, which attracts many vulnerable populations, of which Black males are numerically the largest component. As McNair et al. (2016) noted, there is a shared responsibility to make the community college the ideal institution, but there is no magic bullet or single strategy that can solve the complexity of Black student success in higher education (Wood & Harris, 2017).

The 'black male crisis' and the response. Empirical research findings on the performance of Black males in higher education are daunting and have become a national issue. An increase in access has not led to a concomitant increase in Black male enrollment at four-year institutions where Black men make up only 5% of the total population. Only 40% of these students will graduate within six years (Beatty & McElderry, 2018). In the community college, Black male performance has led some to refer to these institutions as having a revolving door rather than an open door (Williams & Coaxum, 2018). The resulting fallout is referred to as the "Black male crisis" (Beatty & McElderry, 2018, p. 17). The immediate response has been to assume that all solutions must be rooted in a racial response and that only those of the same racial/ethnic background can assist. In their research on strategies and practices to support men of color in the community college, Wood and Harris (2017) refuted this, noting the proverbial "a rising tide lifts all boats" (p. 9) works for minority males. Wood and Harris (2017) used the proverb to assert that "all staff can effectively support men of color, regardless of their racial/ethnic and gender backgrounds (pp. 9-10). The following

sections present some implications for practice that are general and holistic, while others acknowledge the need for programs that specifically address the needs of Black males.

Precollege stakeholders. The societal inequality Black males face are often epitomized by their treatment in the K-12 system, the primary conduit to higher education. As evidenced by this study's findings and the extant literature, many Black male students often start college without the academic and sociocultural capital of the privileged class, which would facilitate their transition to college (Strayhorn, 2012b). All of the current study participants had the intent to attend college, but few received the information in a format they needed from their high schools to put that intent into action. Were it not for their families, in some cases, and their fortitude, these participants may have never acted on that intent. There are deeply engrained societal beliefs grounded in a history of racism and stereotypes that Black boys and men are intellectually inferior (Harper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2012b). Current study findings exposed the need for better dissemination of information about college, especially to non-traditional, first-generation students, of which Black men are a large part.

High schools. First-generation students often have to rely on their high schools to disseminate information about the college process. Four of the five current study participants did not have a parent that had completed college and relied heavily on their high schools to guide them through the process. Yet, only one of these first-generation participants felt prepared for the structure and rigor of college, because he had taken dual enrollment classes. The others relied, for the most, part on information from non-instructional staff members. Ample information about college, including the application, admission, and financial aid processes as well as the college's expectations of its

students, should be provided to all students in a formal setting with teachers, counselors, and visiting college personnel. This also will give students the opportunity to interact with college staff and ask questions.

College assistance program (CAP) advisors. CAP advisors are tasked primarily with the nonacademic preparation of students for college, which often includes help with the college search and application process. When asked who prepared them for college, participants did not mention any systematic dissemination of information by school advisors. K-12 systems nationwide must ensure that low-performing schools in the neediest areas are staffed with these personnel. To meet the needs of such vulnerable populations, CAP advisors should work intentionally and strategically to advise students about college and to invite college recruiters to the high school to provide pertinent information to students through college fairs and expos. This mutually beneficial relationship could result in more students who are better prepared for college.

Working in conjunction with classroom teachers, CAP advisors can also organize parent information sessions on the college process, especially for first-generation students. Participants in the current study articulated the importance of family in their intent and final decision to attend college, which is in keeping with findings in the literature (Harper, 2012; Williams & Coaxum, 2018; Wood & Williams, 2013). Based on their findings from a qualitative study on the lived experiences of eight Black males attending a community college, Williams and Coaxum (2018) noted that Black men do not make the decision to go to college on their own, but with the encouragement and participation of their extended family. The influence of family was evident in the lives of all of the participants. If families are not informed, these first- generation students could

be excluded from the life-alternating personal, economic and societal changes attending college can bring.

Diversity efforts, training, and mentoring. Implied in most of the students' stories was the low expectations some of their teachers had of their attending college because they were Black and, for the most part, from low-income families in the inner city. Researchers like Harper (2010, 2012, 2015) and Strayhorn, 2012a have written extensively on the stereotyping of Black males as lazy and less intelligent than other racial and ethnic groups. These stereotypical biases and misconceptions do not start in college, but are entrenched in society and the school system. Therefore, it is imperative that high schools diversify and train their staff. As with diversity efforts in the college setting, this should not be a superficial attempt as seen in some annual Black History Month events, but diversity imbued in the curriculum year-round, hiring practices that recruit diverse staff, and targeted training (Gurin, 1999). Mentoring programs, specifically for Black males, (Brooms, 2016) are also important. As one participant noted, it was an advisor in a mentoring program for minority males at his high school who gave him the most information about college.

Summer bridge programs and aspirational capital. Beatty and McElderry (2018) listed bridge programs as among the programs that should be funded to assist "vulnerable student populations" (p. 170). Harper (2012) is also an advocate of these programs. With the primary goal of providing transitional and college survival skills, such programs should be offered on campus and staffed by college personnel to provide an authentic experience for Black male students. For those who are academically ready, the "bridge" could be their enrollment in a dual enrollment course in hopes that achieving college

credits would provide the impetus to enter and finish college. This acquisition of capital

can be a smart return on the investments of both high schools and colleges, as high

schools will send more students to college, and the colleges are admitting better prepared

students. These programs can also bolster aspirational capital (Wang et al., 2018). Wang

et al. (2018) noted that successful summer programs should be structured to encourage "a

two-way socialization process" (p. 25). While diverse students acquire academic skills,

educators accept the alternative capital these students bring to the table and encourage

students to incorporate aspects of their background into their academic work (Wang et

al., 2018). This anti-deficit approach, also known as the asset approach, is touted by

Harper (2012) and advocated by Wood and Williams (2018) as a viable way to assist

Black men toward success in the community college.

Community colleges. These two-year institutions are structurally different from

and attract a different population than four-year colleges and universities. Some

researchers have argued that these attributes contribute to the difficulty community

colleges have with persistence and retention (Crisp & Mina, 2012). Others noted that

many of these institutions really want to assist Black men (Wood & Harris, 2017) and

already have the programs in place, but do not know how to make them efficient and

effective (Beatty & McElderry, 2018). As research has indicated, the factors in their

success are complex (Dulabaum, 2016), so there is no panacea for all Black male students

or all community colleges, but there are commonalities. Once students enter college,

they need to be provided resources such as adequate and targeted student services (Wood

& Harris 2017), they need to feel that they belong (Strayhorn, 2016b), they need to have

supportive and encouraging faculty (Rendon,1994; Wood, 2014) , and they need to be

encouraged to be involved (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993)   All of these were contributing factors to the success of the current study's participants and are important implications for practice in the community college.

   Student services. Tasked with providing the crucial assistance students need outside of the classroom, this department of student services is pivotal to student success. At the campus where the research was conducted, advisement, testing, career services, and disability services were under the auspices of the student services department. While none of the study participants showed reluctance to access these services, they attributed their success to their interactions with advisors from specific programs such as TRIO and organizations such as the Student Government Organization. These students sought support outside of the traditional student services department, which as Wood and Harris (2017) found in their research, is not uncommon for this population, for whom access, efficacy, and care are important. Access pertains to the availability of services in terms of their location and time periods; efficacy refers to the student's perception of the effectiveness of the information they receive; and care pertains to how they were treated during the process. Community colleges must review and rethink these three components to accommodate students who work; to structure and implement effective orientations that inform students about the resources available and their locations; and to retrain their staff to effectively communicate with students in a caring manner while dispensing the information they need (Wood & Harris, 2017).

   Mandatory orientation and first-year programs*.* Although the site of the current study has a mandatory on-campus orientation for first-time-in-college (FTIC) students, all the information is covered in approximately four hours. The structure of the

orientation, mandatory and in-person, is a best practice, however, the length of the orientation is viewed as inadequate (Wood & Harris, 2017). With such a large enrollment of first-generation and FTIC students, community colleges should have orientations that extend beyond one day, considering the vast amount of information students are expected to retain (Wood and Harris, 2017). In addition, a separate orientation should be implemented for the parents for whom college is also a formidable and alien environment. Furthermore, colleges should mandate a first-year experience (FYE) credited course to reinforce much of the crucial college strategies and pertinent information covered in orientation. Taken in the first semester, this course needs to be standardized to ensure that students are receiving the same information. Essentially an extension of orientation, the FYE course should be a further elucidation of the inner workings of college to help students avoid the pitfalls experienced by the participants in this study, such as the loss of financial aid.

In their guidebook on the best practices to support Black and other men of color in the community college, Wood and Harris (2017) argued in favor of mandating some student service practices, such as advisement and tutoring, and to create a campus culture of "structural intrusivity and intrusive practices" (p. 63). They also recommended codifying these mandatory practices in the syllabus as a course requirement. The authors further maintained that these intrusive practices are necessary since the success of Black male collegians is negatively impacted by their reluctance to seek help (Harris & Wood, 2013; Wood & Harris, 2017) whether from displaced masculine influences or not having the time to get help because of work or other external factors.

Sense of belonging: campus culture and climate. Feeling a connection to and welcomed by their institution were proven facilitators of participants' success. Also referred to as a sense of belonging, this non-cognitive factor, is said to have overtaken access to college as the key variable in the success of Black men in higher education (Strayhorn, 2012a). A sense of belonging is similar to the construct of validation advanced by Rendon (1994). Both advocate for minority students to feel valued and welcomed on college campuses. Consistent with prior research, the participants in this study linked their sense of belonging to their interaction with faculty. "[W]hen men of color are educated in environments where they receive validation, expressions of authentic care, and when they interact with educators who intentionally build relationships with them, they are more likely to achieve" (Harris, et al., 2017, p. 15). Current study participants also spoke of the advisors or mentors who made them feel cared for, and they shared with enthusiasm how their involvement on campus positively affected their experiences at the campus. This is supportive of Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) assertion that the more students are integrated into the academic and social life of an institution, the more likely they are to persist.

Faculty. Repeatedly, positive faculty interaction both in and out of the classroom has been cited as one of the key contributors to the persistence of Black men in the community college (Wood, 2014; Wood & Ireland, 2014). Wood and Ireland (2014) noted that Black male collegians often do not see faculty as supportive and even speak of being disrespected by them. Ironically, Black men, more than other populations, need interaction with faculty but are the least likely to experience it. Some students indicated that systematic racism was one of the main reasons they avoided faculty (Wood &

Ireland, 2014). Current and other research findings provide community colleges with enough evidence to inspire intentionality in their hiring as well as timely training of faculty to be more culturally aware and sensitive. Such education must be long-term and consistent. In addition, a safe-reporting protocol should be established and publicized so that students can report alleged acts of racism or discrimination and have them judiciously investigated. Black male students also need to see themselves represented in the faculty. Although not all current study participants mentioned race in relation to faculty, when they did, it was significant. One had a positive experience with a professor he felt had assisted him and related to him because the professor was also Black. Another student said he was discriminated against by a Hispanic professor whom he felt treated Black students differently from Hispanic students.

Mentoring: traditional and reciprocal. As the stories of participants revealed, if mentors are not available in an official capacity, students will gravitate toward anyone willing to help. While this may support a few resourceful students, structured mentoring programs such as the Black Male Initiative (BMI) programs can provide a special place for Black men to feel affirmed and supported (Brooms, 2016). These designated programs and spaces provide students the opportunity to interact with each other and reduce feelings of isolation, and have been shown to build cultural, social, and academic capital, which are key to persistence (Brooms, 2016). Wendt (2018) also proposed what she called "reciprocal mentoring" (p. 97) programs to promote positive interaction between faculty and minority male students, which in turn can lead to their persistence and success in college. Reciprocity is achieved when the students are in a safe place and can share their lived experiences about college with faculty who listen and offer guidance

on how the students can succeed in their academic pursuits. This approach would require the mentors to be trained and involved faculty to be committed (Wendt, 2018), but can be another tool in the arsenal of solutions to better retain Black males who attend community colleges.

Integration and Persistence. Tinto's theory (1975, 1987, 1993) that students who are academically and socially integrated into their postsecondary institution are more likely to persist was borne out in this study. Participants who were actively involved in organizations and activities expressed a sense of increased connectivity to the college and their advisors in these organizations. Students also credited these programs, such as TRIO as SGA, with providing them with the opportunity to travel and network with important college and state personnel. The two participants who were the most socially integrated were also the most successful academically.

However, the typology of the community college student often makes it difficult for such involvement to happen. The typical student is working and commutes to campus only for classes (Crisp & Mina, 2012). Therefore, as with student services, colleges must ensure that activities and organization meetings are offered during various times. One of the most involved students in the current study also worked on campus, which made it easier for him to be active on campus. Increasing work-study and other job opportunities on campus would provide students with not only the money they need, but also the opportunity to stay on campus for extracurricular activities.

Seeking opportunities to be involved and engaged on campus is also the responsibility of the student. If the institution has programs such as TRIO and student organizations such as SGA and BMI, which can benefit them, then Black males have to

take the initiative to get involved. The TRIO program at the research site required an application, an interview process, and mandatory meetings with an advisor. The one student who was a member made the commitment while working and attending classes to apply to the program and attend the mandatory appointments with his advisor. One of the SGA member had rigorous classes as a computer engineering major, worked, and was still actively involved in the organization, even serving as its president at one point. Black male students also need to use the resources available at the institutions such as tutoring and seek help from college personnel. Study participants attributed much of their success to the assistance they received from staff, but this meant making the time and effort to do so. One study participant specifically mentioned making it his responsibility to find needed resources both in high school and college; he attributed his success to doing so. Kuh (2001) described student engagement in terms of the effort put forth by the institutions to effectively engage students as well as how much time and how much purpose or intensity students invested in educationally related activities. Therefore, engagement and involvement require students to do their part as well. Institutional effort must be met with concomitant student effort.

Administrators. Community college administrators are tasked with managing institutions designed to educate underprepared students with limited capital and to do so with fewer resources than four-year colleges (Crisp & Mina, 2012). Though daunting, this task is essential. Leaders of community colleges are well aware of the types of students who attend their open access institutions, including a large percentage of Black males. Two of the major challenges facing community college leadership are how to increase their retention rates and how to be truly diverse. Community college

administrators will also be tasked with creating what McNair et al. (2016) called a "student-ready college."

Retention efforts. As Crisp and Mina (2012) pointed out, students persist and institutions retain. This subtle semantic difference places the responsibility on the institution for keeping students on a path to completion. Two key implications from this study are that Black male students have already overcome many challenges before they enter college and that they need help to continue their education once enrolled. Although the five participants in the study had the fortitude and tenacity to persist, this is not the case with all students. Community colleges know that most of their students are first-generation who do not have parents who can instill the capital they need for college (London, 1989; Terenzini, Springer, Yaegar, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). They also know that many of their students attend part time while working to support themselves or assist their families (Crisp & Mina, 2012, Wood and Harris, 2017).

With this knowledge, retention efforts for Black male students must be structured and organized from the beginning of their college lives. As previously mentioned, community colleges must work to enhance resources in terms of variety and availability. Many student services, such as advising and supplemental instruction, are offered during traditional working hours (Crisp & Mina, 2012), which are best suited for traditional, full-time students like those at four-year schools, many of whom live on campus. However, community college students are usually commuters who leave campus immediately after class for home or work. Community colleges administrators should restructure their institutions to ensure that courses and services are offered at varying times, including weekends (Wood & Harris, 2017).

Crisp and Mina (2012) examined institutional practices that may negatively impact community college retention rates and found a heavy reliance on part-time faculty. The researchers noted that close to two-thirds of faculty at community colleges work part time, thereby reducing the amount of time they have to meet with students. Faculty engagement is a key contributor to the student success of all students (Crisp & Mina, 2012), and especially Black male students (Wood, 2014; Wood & Ireland, 2014). Therefore, it is imperative that community college administrators make a concerted effort to hire more full-time faculty and to ensure that both full- and part-time faculty provide a wide variety of office hours to meet with students; in addition, the colleges can ask all faculty to maintain contact with students via various online and technological platforms (Wood & Harris, 2017).

Diversity efforts. The research site for this study offered an interesting perspective on diversity in higher education. At both the research site and the rest of the college, Hispanics, a recognized federal minority, are a majority. Yet having a minority group as the majority population did not mitigate the feelings some participants had that they were "underrepresented" in some classes or that teachers had treated them differently from the Hispanic students. Diversity is a complex construct; community colleges can no longer simply state that they are diverse or committed to diversity. They must work to create a truly diverse environment. This includes structural diversity, having a diverse student body and faculty, and interactional diversity, where opportunities exist for diverse groups to have positive interaction. There also is classroom diversity, where students are exposed to the stories and history of diverse groups (Gurin, 1999). Concerted efforts will have to be made to achieve real diversity on

college campus through authentic efforts to recruit diverse personnel; to structure and mandate inclusive curricula; and to encourage real dialogue about the racial climate on some campuses. The latter is one recommendation Harper (2012) made to deal with toxic campus climates.

The student-ready college. Historically in American higher education, the responsibility was placed on students to be ready for college by taking the right classes in high school or showing aptitude on standardized tests. However, McNair et al. (2016) called for a paradigm shift in higher education where the responsibility for readiness also belongs to the college and its leadership. This new framework requires college administrators to stop focusing on what students lack and instead, with laser-like intensity, dissect what they can do to "create stronger, higher-quality educational environments that promote full inclusion and continuous improvement" (p. xii). A student-ready college works like an ecosystem where all parts are necessary for survival; therefore, the leadership has to empower all personnel, through training and affirmation, to be involved in student success. Colleges that are student-ready also need to work with the wider community, including local and state entities, to provide the resources for their diverse student body. Collaboration with the community can include mentoring opportunities for Black male students by pairing them with successful community leaders; internships to help students gain necessary employment and networking skills; and jobs with community partners to provide students with experience as well as income (McNair et al., 2016).

State and local policymakers. In recent years, community colleges have come under increased scrutiny as policymakers demand more accountability and return on their

investments of state funds in higher education. To this end, the state of Florida recently implemented a performance-based funding formula; two of its measures are retention and completion. Failure to meet these measures can result in a reduction in funding, which could reduce valuable resources not only for Black men, but other vulnerable populations who attend community colleges.

Crisp and Mina (2012) suggested that retention be measured differently for community colleges because of their student demographic and their mission to provide multiple pathways to attainment, which range from degrees to vocational training. This is worth investigating, not only to avoid unintended negative effects, but also to provide a better picture of what success may accurately look like at a community college. For example, if students attend a community college for two semesters to improve their grades before transferring to a university and does so successfully, the students achieved their goal. If changing the way retention is calculated to give these institutions a fighting chance is not possible, then the funds taken away for not meeting state performance standards should be repurposed into resources such as structured tutoring and mentoring programs.

Potential Limitations/Limitations

The results of this qualitative, phenomenological study add to the extant literature on Black males who attend community colleges. The addition of the lived experiences of these students to a preponderance of secondary data also provides further context to what we know about this population. One potential limitation was the researcher's role at the research site. As an administrator at the small campus where the research was conducted, all the participants knew the researcher. This could have influenced some of their

responses. Therefore, every effort was made to create a professional distance from the students and assure them of confidentiality. Each student was allowed to choose a pseudonym, and, except for one participant, the interviews were not conducted in the researcher's office. The one interview that was conducted in the researcher's office due to scheduling difficulties, was conducted after work hours to minimize any perception that the roles of administrator and researcher were comingled.

One limitation of the study pertained to sample size. The sample size required for the phenomenological method was small, and the research was conducted at only one campus of the college. Since each campus of the college has different demographics, replication of the study at other campuses or other colleges could produce different results. In addition, this study examined only the racial identity of the students with no exploration of the intersectionality of race and ethnic identity in the Black male population. The study's research site does not distinguish between race and ethnicity in its demographic reporting nor does most of the extant literature reviewed. Therefore, the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender was not explored.

Future Research

No one study can capture the complexity of the lived experiences of Black men in higher education, especially the community college. Both the students and institutions are ripe for further study. Black males enter community colleges already buffeted by systemic racism and institutional practices that classify them as lazy and not as intellectually acute as others. Their overwhelming placement in ESE classes in K-12 is evidence of the latter, and discrimination against them can take the form of overt action

or more subtle microaggressions. If Black male students internalize these messages and dialogues, they may decide to perpetuate the stereotypes.

This study was conducted with a small population of Black males who attended a primarily Hispanic-serving institution where a nationally recognized minority is a majority. Their experiences at the HSI were similar to those of Black men attending PWIs. While commonalities and themes can be extrapolated from the stories of this study's participants, more expansive research is needed with a larger population of students attending HSIs. The in-group diversity of Black men attending community colleges is also worthy of further research. The research site did not disaggregate data on Black men by ethnicity, so this study did not explore the intersectionality of race and ethnicity that is often evident in this population.

Future research is also needed on aspirational capital in Black males attending community colleges. Aspirational capital is thought to wane as Black men progress through college, but this was not the case with the study's participants. Wanting more for themselves and their families, the five males in this study persisted regardless of the challenges and barriers they faced. None of the participants mentioned any connection to or receiving any assistance from cultural sources such as the church and community. This could have been a coincidence or a major paradigm shift in this generation. The possible changing role of Black cultural forces on younger generations of Black males also needs further examination.

Final Thoughts

Black men do not enter college *tabula rasa*. The current study found that by the time they decided to attend a postsecondary institution, many societal, personal, and

environmental factors had shaped their lives. Many of the participants had already experienced systematic racism inside and outside school. Some had attended schools that did little to prepare them for college. Many were first-generation students with limited to no prior knowledge of how college works. To make the initial decision to attend college was dependent on a myriad of factors, such as family encouragement, preparation in high school, and often an innate desire to better themselves. It is this same inner strength that allowed them to persist even when they lacked the standard academic and sociocultural capital that those who are better prepared have learned from their family, school, or societal interactions. This tenacity to persist was buoyed by the one consistent theme expressed by all participants, which was to make their lives better.

Study participants' perceptions that attending college would improve their future is borne out repeatedly in the research literature as the reason that more Black males attend community colleges than any other minority group. In the case of the five participants, they all persisted. This success is incongruent with the statistical data that most Black men attending these institutions do not persist to attain any credentials, be they degrees or certificates. Two of the participants had already earned associate degrees and the others were on track to do so.

The history of Black men in higher education, especially in the community college, is replete with their failures to succeed. Yet, the participants in this study showed that it is possible for Black men to defy the stereotypes with a combination of innate strength as well as institutional and familial help. However, because such support is not always there, it is incumbent on community colleges to provide Black men with the resources they need to succeed by way of targeted and intentional policies and programs.

This is in keeping with the paradigm shift in higher education that calls on institutions to be student-ready rather than the longstanding expectation that readiness is the sole responsibility of the student. However, this does not negate the responsibility students also have for their education. Black men must put aside their pride and false sense of masculinity and seek help when necessary.

Finally, administrators must pay more than lip service to diversity. They must ensure that faculty and staff are representative of their student body, that the curriculum is diverse, and that programs are implemented to provide safe places for Black males. What institutions fail to do or cannot do must be investigated and addressed at the state level. In short, it will take the coordinated efforts of all stakeholders to ensure the replication of the success of this study's participants on a larger scale. There is too much at stake at the personal and societal level for these issues to go unaddressed.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email

My name is Carol Clinton. I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education program of the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Miami, under the direction of Professor Debbiesiu Lee, Ph.D.

I am conducting research for my dissertation on the factors that influence Black men to remain in college, specifically at the community college. I am inviting Black men at (MASKED) College, (MASKED) Campus who have been enrolled for more than two semesters to participate in a 60 to 90-minute interview. All information will be kept confidential and every effort will be made to protect your privacy. Additionally, please know that at any time during the process you can choose to stop participating in the study.

If you are interested in participating, please complete the short questionnaire attached to this email. Since this is a minimal risk study, your agreement to be interviewed, will be your consent to participate in this study. Please note that your answers to the questions will not be shared with anyone. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the research study, please contact me by phone at (redacted) or by email at (redacted). Again, your participation in this study is voluntary.

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Name: _____

2. Race/Ethnicity: _____

3. Age: _____

4. What year did you graduate high school? _____

5. What year did you start college? _____

6. Did you attend any other colleges, if so where and when? _____

   _____

7. How many semesters of college have you completed? _____

8. Major: _____

9. Current G.P.A.: _____

10. Do you attend college full time or part time? _____

11. Are you currently enrolled in classes? _____

12. If no, when was the last semester you took a class? _____

13. What is your father's highest level of education? _____

14. What is your mother's highest level of education? _____

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me briefly about yourself?

2. What did you know about college before attending and from whom?
     i. Did your school discuss attending college?
     ii. Did your family discuss attending college?
     iii. Who else discussed college with you?

3. What made you decide to come to college?
     i. What role did your parents play in your decision to attend college?
     ii. What role did your school play in your decision to attend college?
     iii. Where there any other influences on your decision to attend college?

4. How prepared were you for college?
     i. Academically?
     ii. Personally?
     iii. Were there any surprises?

5. Why did you choose (MASKED) College, (MASKED) campus?

6. What has your overall experience been like at the campus?

7. What positive experiences did you have at the campus?

8. What challenges have you experienced at the campus?
     i. Are there any specific challenges/barriers you experienced as a Black male?

9. How did you overcome these challenges?
     i. Who or what helped you to overcome these challenges/barriers?
     ii. What resources did you use on or off campus?
     iii. Who assisted you the most on or off campus?
     iv. What personal characteristics helped you deal with these challenges/barriers?

10. What advice would you give to Black men to help them in college in terms of the following:
     i. Strategies to get into college?
     ii. Strategies on how to stay in college?
     iii. Any general advice you may have?

Appendix D

Follow-up Questions via Phone

1. Did you take Advanced Placement (AP) or honors classes in high school?

    i. If yes, why?
    ii. If no, why not?

2. Did you take the SAT or ACT during high school?

    i. If yes, why?
    ii. If no, why not?

3. Was the college application process difficult for you?

4. Was the financial aid application process difficult for you?

5. Did you receive financial aid? If so, was it the Pell grant you did not have to pay

    back or the loan you had to pay back?

6. Did you work during college?

    i. Full time or part time?
    ii. If you did, why did you have to work?

7. Did you have any issue with transportation during college?

    i. If yes, explain

8. Did you have any issues with having enough food during college?

    i. If yes, explain

Appendix E

Participants

The participants in this study were five Black males who had completed at least two semesters at the research site. The participants were all in their early twenties and started college soon after graduating from high school. All five of the students lived in the surrounding area of the campus, although one moved there after growing up and completing high school in a different part of the county. Four of the participants had attended large, urban public schools and one them had attended a smaller, local charter school in the vicinity of the campus. All of the participants were born in the United States, two of immigrant parents from Haiti, and the other three from parents born in the United States. In their response to the demographic questions, two students identified as Black, one of whom had a parent born in Haiti, two identified as African-American and one, the other student with immigrant parents from Haiti, identified as Black/Haitian American.

None of the participants experienced food security issues that are, at times, a problem for this population. Only one student experienced problems with transportation and mentioned having to take the bus or a paid car service. While a few had some difficulty with the financial aid application because of its complexity, they each sought help and did not allow the issues to dissuade them from attending college. The same was true for the college application. They all sought help from parents, friends, or the college they planned on attending.

Student #1: John Smith is 23 years old and identifies as Black. He was born in the United States, but his parents were born in Haiti. His parents both graduated from high school, but never attended college. The Business Administration major who started college directly after high school had completed an Associate of Science degree and had returned to complete an Associate in Arts. He is currently enrolled in classes full time and has a self-declared GPA is 2.65. He is a recipient of the Pell Grant, a federal financial subsidy awarded to students with financial need and is usually indicative of a student's lower economic status.

Student #2: Derek Smith is 20 years old and identifies as African-American. Both he and his parents were born in the United States. While his father attended college, he did not attain a degree. His mother has a high school diploma. The Computer Engineering major who started college directly after high school is in his 8th semester of college and is currently enrolled in classes full time. His self-declared GPA is 2.9. He is a recipient of the Pell Grant.

Student #3: John Michael is 20 years old and identifies as Black. Both he and his parents were born in the United States. His father has a Bachelor's degree and his mother has a Master's. The Business Administration major who started college directly after high school is in his 6th semester of college and is currently enrolled full time. His self-declared GPA is 3.52. He is a recipient of the Pell Grant.

Student #4: Steve Brown is 21 years old and identifies as African-American. His mother was born in the United States. She did not complete high school and is now deceased. The Sociology major who started high school directly after college is in his 5th semester college and is currently enrolled part time. He had experienced problems with

financial aid and housing issues. His self-declared GPA is 2.8. He is a recipient of the Pell Grant.

Student 5#: Alfredo Bowman is 22 years old and identifies as Black/Haitian-American. He was born in the United States and his parents were born in Haiti. His parents both have high school diplomas. The Environmental Science major who started college directly after high school graduated this Spring semester and has been accepted to a public Florida University. His self-declared GPA is 3.5. He is a recipient of the Pell Grant.