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African American Males' Identification of Factors That Contributed to their Community College Persistence

Ulissa Byshelle Coburn

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African American males' identification of factors that contributed
to their community college persistence

By

Ulissa Byshelle Coburn

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Community College Leadership
in the Department of Education

Mississippi State, Mississippi

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2017

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DEDICATION

I begin this dedication by giving thanks to God for providing me the vision to step out on faith to pursue my dream of completing my doctorate program in Community College Leadership. I owe an enormous debt and gratitude to those whose love, patience, and motivation kept me on the right path of completing this degree.

In trying to complete this degree, it cost my kids less play dates, family vacations, and quality time spent with me. To my children, Haven, Piers, Melody, and Noah, you are the motivation to my success of achieving this degree. I want to encourage each of you to always dream and believe with God everything is possible with faith and determination. My parents, Harold and Magolean, your love and helping with the kids were always appreciated and the help offered throughout this process could never be repaid. I thank you for always putting the seed of thought that education came first in my life as a child. To my only brother, Harold Jr., you have always seen the prosperity within me even when I wasn't sure of myself. I must thank you for your constant talk of African American males. It propelled my drive in researching and learning more about African American males. You are a great uncle and mentor to my boys, we are eternally grateful. To my love, Anthony, the countless times spent listening and understanding my drive to achieve my life's dream of obtaining my doctorate degree I am truly grateful for your love and patience as I completed this process.

As a parent, I aspire to motivate and inspire my kids to dream, I was allowed to live my dream through the grace of God. It was the cultivation of dreaming of becoming a doctoral students and making that vision mature into what it is today. The seed was planted before my acceptance into the doctorate program. After acceptance, I had a

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In spite of an expanding enrollment of African American males in community colleges in the United States, the early departure of this minority group is one of concern. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore African American males' identification of the factors that contributed to their persistence at community colleges. Data were collected through structured interviews with 7 African American male community college graduates who were enrolled at a 4-year university when the study was conducted. Data were analyzed through by coding and categorizing in order to determine themes. Social integration and social cognitive models were used to obtain an understanding of the factors that allowed these students to persist in their studies and obtain their associate degree.

With this study, the researcher aimed at creating a mental picture of African American male students who have completed an associate degree by identifying the factors that African American males perceived contributed to their persistence. This study builds upon the limited amount of research available which focused on African American males attending community colleges. The researcher sought to bring understanding to

factors affecting the persistence of African American males at community colleges. The study's findings are significant as they highlight African American males' identification of persistence factors; this information could be used by community college administrators to better support the success rates of African American males.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Background of the Problem.....	3
	Statement of the Problem	5
	Significance of the Study.....	6
	Purpose of the Study.....	7
	Research Question	7
	Theoretical Framework	7
	Tinto's Theory of Social Integration	8
	Bandura's Social Cognitive Model	9
	Definition of Terms	9
	Delimitations	11
	Limitations.....	11
	Overview of the Study.....	12
II.	REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	14
	Historical Overview.....	15
	Community College.....	16
	African American Males in Higher Education.....	18
	Persistence in Higher Education.....	19
	Factors Influencing Persistence	21
	Institutional Factors	27
	Summary.....	28
III.	RESEARCH DESIGN.....	29
	Research Question	29
	Research Design	30
	Selection of Participants	31
	Data Collection and Analysis	32
	Procedures	33
	Researcher's Role.....	34
	Trustworthiness	35
	Ethical Considerations.....	37
	Summary.....	37

CHAPTER

IV.	FINDINGS	39
	Research Question	40
	Participant Profiles	40
	Participant #1 Alpha	40
	Participant #2 Beta	40
	Participant #3 Gamma	41
	Participant #4 Delta	41
	Participant #5 Epsilon.....	41
	Participant #6 Zeta.....	41
	Participant #7 Eta	42
	Findings	43
	Theme 1: Family and Better Life	45
	Subtheme 1a: Balance and support.....	47
	Subtheme 1b: Walking in and Beyond Parents' Footsteps	50
	Subtheme 1c: Improving Finances, Dispelling Stereotypes.....	52
	Summary.....	55
V.	DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	56
	Discussion.....	57
	Theme 1: Family and Better Life	58
	Subtheme 1a: Balance and Support.....	59
	Subtheme 1b: Walking in and Beyond Parents' Footsteps	60
	Subtheme 1c: Improving Finances, Dispelling Stereotypes.....	60
	Conclusion.....	61
	Implications for Practice.....	63
	Recommendations for Future Research.....	64
	REFERENCES	66
	APPENDIX	
A.	COMMUNITY COLLEGE SELECTION DEMOGRAPHICS	80
B.	OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	82
C.	APPROVAL LETTER.....	84
D.	RECRUITMENT FLYER	86

LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table 1.</i> Participants of the Study	42
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Community colleges have established the pathway for many searching for their paths in life. Since its earliest formation, the community college was an extension of high school. In 1901, Joliet Community College offered added courses that extended the curriculum of the secondary educational training (Kasper, 2003). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2016), community colleges also were created to provide educational institutions geographically close to students' homes and usually have lower tuition and smaller classes for students. As such, the community college has been the best postsecondary option because of its cost, size, and location (Wells, 2008).

The evolution of community colleges has paved the way for various avenues in the workforce and educational settings. For example, community colleges have established pathways and connections to job markets and advanced college degrees. Community colleges serve 3,119,551 full-time students across the United States at their 1,123 institutions (AACC, 2016). National statistics show about 70% of high schools students enroll in community colleges, universities, or training schools within two years of completing high school, with only about half of those students actually completing a credential program (Bragg & Durham, 2012). With such a vast number of students enrolling at community colleges, it is vital to these institutions to maintain their

enrollment numbers. It is important for institutions to retain incoming freshmen because if these students drop out, the institution will incur financial loss. With the steady enrollment of black males, it is vital to examine the factors that will sustain their completion of an associate degree.

Community colleges offer a wealth of avenues for various groups; however, they appear to be the college of opportunity for minority students, including many African American males. African American males compose the second largest group of ethnic students enrolling at community colleges (AACC, 2015). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2014), there were 376,997 African American males enrolled in public 2-year and private, for-profit 2-year institutions during the fall of 2014. This number represents 14% of the total community college enrollment during the fall semester of 2014 in the United States (AACC, 2015).

While enrollment numbers for African American males are high, many African American male community college students on the academic path do not complete the requirements for their associate's degree. Woods (2012) and Strayhorn (2012) contend that African American males have lower completion rates at community colleges when compared to other enrolled ethnic groups. Similarly, Woods and Ireland (2014) explain the departure rate was 11.5% for African American males withdrawing from community college within the first year.

With such significant enrollments of African American males, community college administrators are concerned about the departure of African American male students from the academic setting before degree completion. Three years after admission, 48.9%

African American males depart from community college before degree attainment (Wood & Ireland, 2014). Wood and Palmer (2013) discussed how community colleges are trying to find ways to increase the graduate rate. By examining the graduation rate, Woods and Ireland (2014) outlined the goals put in place by stakeholders, college leaders, and policymakers. The goal was to increase the graduation rates of underrepresented and underserved students such as African American male students at community colleges.

As a result of African American males' early departure, community colleges are faced with a sense of urgency in identifying and creating preventive tools to improve persistence (Wood & Williams, 2013). Some researchers have examined the impact African American males have on the statistical make-up of community colleges. Poindexter (2006) explained how institutions mold their programs to fit the changing needs of students. Community college administrators utilize data gathered about the interests of the students. Because African American males enroll in community colleges in such high numbers, administrators focus on meeting the needs of African American males as their enrollment results in financial gain for the institutions (Wood & Ireland, 2014; Wood & Williams, 2013). It also could be argued that administrators want to support African American males in their quest for higher professional and educational aspirations (Nevarez & Wood, 2011).

Background of the Problem

While enrollment numbers for African American males are high, many African American male community college students on the academic path do not complete the requirements for their associate's degree. Wood, Hilton, and Lewis (2011) investigated

the reasoning behind the departure of black males, and Wood (2012) found that the odds of African American males dropping out of community colleges due to family responsibilities were 394% greater than their white counterparts. This present study will fill a gap in the literature by expanding the limited research while focusing on the factors influencing African American male students' persistence in community college. A number of factors positively impact the persistence of African American male community college students who do complete the requirements for their degrees (Bush & Bush, 2010; Mason, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998; Wells, 2008; Wood, Hilton & Lewis, 2011), and these factors have been examined by several researchers.

Mason (1998) completed a study that focused on the low persistence of African American “nontraditional” students in community colleges. Mason examined several variables that contributed to persistence, including environmental, academic, and background. Mason contended that motivation to succeed based on family was one variable that impacted black males to stay enrolled. Other variables relevant to the progress of these students were educational goals, background, academics, study habits, absenteeism, and major areas of study.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) explained that persistence relates to a student in terms of the shift in the significance of community colleges, financial support of these institutions, and the impact of technology use in their implementation of education. It could not be determined that the same interventions would work for other individuals. Pascarella and Terenzini noted that the focus should be on the conditional effects that impact a student's persistence.

Wells (2008) examined the influences of social and cultural capital on the persistence of first and second year students. Wells also examined the difference between community colleges and 4-year institutions. This study established a better understanding of the ways that persistence decisions may play a role in either overcoming social barriers or reinforcing them.

To further identify the dilemma of African American males in the educational system, Bush and Bush (2010) categorized the pitfalls for college dropout for African American males and referred to identifying these pitfalls as “calling out the elephants” (p. 57). Bush and Bush explained that only 8% of African American male community college students completed a degree though their enrollment numbers accounted for 81% of African American males in the postsecondary system in California.

Statement of the Problem

African American males consistently enlist the help of these community colleges to carve their destinies. The pathways to the job market and to baccalaureate universities have led many African American males to select the community college as the path that provides a quality education within a limited budget. This has been the case for many students deciding to attend a community college. However, many African American males enrolled at community colleges on the academic path do not persist. Researchers have identified several possible factors that impact persistence and early departure for African American males (Bush & Bush, 2010; Mason, 1998; Wood & Williams, 2013). These factors are academic, background, environmental, social, and/or institutional factors.

Still, more research was needed to determine, from the perspectives of the African American males through qualitative interviews, African American males' identification of the factors that influenced their persistence. Specifically, a study was needed that not only focused on persistence in the form of having completed the requirements for their associate degree, but also from the perspective of African American males who were enrolled in a 4-year university at the time the study was conducted. Perhaps a study which investigates factors influencing the persistence of African American males at community colleges using qualitative methods could provide a more nuanced view of these factors from the African American male perspective.

Significance of the Study

Community college administrators are concerned about the dismal retention rates of their students. As cause for their concern, it is evident that 11.8% of African American male community college students leave college during their first year (Urias & Wood, 2014). The early departure of these students needs to be addressed with community college administrators because the departure of students equates loss of revenue from those students. The staggering departure of African American males at the community college level contributed significantly to a loss of economic revenue for the institutions they attend.

There is a need for this study because African American males are the largest ethnic group enrolled in community college who depart before completing a degree. Supplying institutions with insight related to African American male persistence can help institutions increase the retention of these students (Bush & Bush, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore African American males' identification of the factors that influenced their community college persistence and, ultimately, their 4-year university enrollment. While previous research has examined specific factors to include academic, background/defining, environmental, social, and institutional (Wood and Williams, 2013), this study used a more general exploration of factors and encouraged participants to discuss openly the factors they considered to be most crucial to their persistence.

Research Question

The study was guided by one main research question. The question, *What factors do African American males identify as most crucial to their persistence at a community college?*, was exploratory in nature and allowed for broad discussions of persistence factors.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study consists of Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) Theory of Social Integration and Bandura's (1991, 1997) Social Cognitive Model. Together, these theories represent a lens for the examination of the factors that contribute to African American male persistence. These theories use the concept of people and their environment, which is very important when examining the effects that social and economic factors play in student retention. When examining people, their environment needs to be taken into consideration. Bean and Eaton (2001) described the environmental variable that predicts student retention. They stated that in order for a student to feel

successful, he or she needs to be academically and socially integrated into that institution. Bean and Eaton (2001) focused on the belief of the student being effective at his or her prospective institution. A student's connection to the establishment leads to persistence. Each of the theories is explained below.

Tinto's Theory of Social Integration

In maintaining the enrollment at community colleges, social integration is one of the perspectives to be used in the study. Tinto (1987) focused on social integration as it relates to the persistence and retention of college students. Tinto (1993) postulated that students progress through stages as they make the transition of being a first-time college student. The changes of these students may impact their decision to remain in school. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) affirmed the effectiveness of Tinto's model on academic and social integration in university settings. They summarized that one factor or multiple factors could interpret a student's persistence. Those factors could pertain to family background, individual attributes, education, or social factors. These factors are interconnected in the persistence of the students.

Tinto (1975, 1987) discussed the aspect of students integrating into college life socially and academically. "Social integration pertains to the extent of congruency between the individual student and the social system of a college" (Tinto, 1975, p. 107). Tinto (1975) postulated that academics and socialization influence a student's commitment to the college. As a student's academic and social influence increase, their commitment to the institution increases.

Bandura's Social Cognitive Model

Bandura (1997) discussed an individual's perception of his or her ability to act in a certain way to obtain a certain outcome. His Social Cognitive Model described how a person could develop a sense of effectiveness and believe that he or she is capable of completing a task. Because of the person's belief, he or she gains confidence and develops higher levels of persistence to complete his or her goal. The main concept of this model is self-efficacy, a person's determination to reach a goal (Bandura, 1997).

As students enroll in community colleges, their persistence is determined by their motivation to reach their goal. Bandura (1991, 1997) discussed the mental state of mind, which is an essential part of this theory. The concept is interrelated to environmental factors, personal factors, and behavior. Bandura noted the following factors after observing a subject: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Each step governs the advancement of the previous one. As the person chooses to change, Bandura (1997) stated that he or she is motivated to accomplish the desired behavior. By implementing persistence plans, African American males are given an outlet to restructure their mental decision of retention.

Definition of Terms

The terms below are defined and conceptualized to further the understanding of how they are applied to this study.

1. *African American*. According to the United States Census (2010), "Black or African American," "a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa" (p. 2).

2. *Academic Factors.* These factors refer to variables that support positive academic behaviors that lead to increased success (Wood & William, 2013). For example, the academic success of students is considered positive by the following behaviors: study hours, going to the library, or meeting with faculty.
3. *Background and Defining Factors.* These factors refer to variables that are expected to affect their academic outcomes (Bean & Metzner, 1975; Mason, 1994) and are related to experiences students had prior to entering college. Specific background and defining factors identified in the literature include educational goals, student's age, student's pre-college academic success, and the parental education attainment.
4. *Community College.* A community college is defined as "any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree" (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 5).
5. *Environmental Factors.* These are variables that "pull" students' attention and intensity away from their collegiate endeavors (Wood & Williams, 2013) and are life circumstances external to the institution that affect students' success within it (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Freeman & Huggans, 2009). Noted environmental factors include student's perception of a lack of money, familial responsibilities, and personal factors.
6. *Institutional Factors.* These factors are the institution's role in facilitating student outcome (Wood & Williams, 2013). Bush and Bush (2010) found that many

college personnel are unwilling to examine how their efforts, policies, and practices impact the persistence of African American male students.

7. *Persistence*. Persistence is a student's purposeful resolve to goal attainment, sometimes known as participation to completion of a credential (Adelman, 2007). In this study, persistence is used to indicate African American males' completion of the associate degree.
8. *Social Factors*. These are variables that include respondents' level of participation in intramural or non-varsity sports, intercollegiate athletics, and other extracurricular activities (Wood & Williams, 2013).

Delimitations

Delimitations are parameters that the researchers select for the study (Stake, 2010). This study was delimited to a sample of seven African American males who graduated from a community college and attended a 4-year university in the Southeast at the time the study was conducted.

Limitations

The limitations are the factors that might affect the study over which the researcher has no control (Stake, 2010). There were several limitations that impacted this study. The limitations related to the initial selection of participants through the community college, the availability of the quantitative instrument, and the honesty of the participants during the interview process.

It was the initial plan to recruit participants with the assistance of a community college. Unfortunately, there were some roadblocks that prevented the use of the

community college as a site of recruitment. The roadblocks were long delays in replying to email communications, administration wanting to change the research topic, and unwillingness to allow the research to be conducted. Because of this limitation, participants were selected from a 4-year university.

It also was the initial plan to use a quantitative instrument to collect data, the Community College Survey of Men (CCSM) (Wood & Harris, 2013). There were numerous attempts made to contact and gain permission for use of the data obtained from the CCSM survey, yet no responses were received. After failed attempts to contact the researchers, the research methodology was changed to allow for the use of open-ended interview questions.

The honesty of the participants' responses was another limitation of the study. In looking at the data presented, the respondents might have been hesitant about answering honestly due to bias or the knowledge that the interviews were audio recorded.

Overview of the Study

With the steady increase of African American males at community colleges, there is a need for institutions to examine the factors that encourage student persistence (Bush & Bush, 2010; Urias & Wood, 2014). The persistence of African American male students at community colleges is a concern. Researchers have examined and outlined various factors that contribute to their early departure from these institutions (Mason, 1998; Wood & Williams, 2013). Those contributing factors examined by researchers are academic, environmental, social, psychological, background, and institutional factors.

The focus of this study was to explore factors that focused on the persistence of African American males at community colleges.

This chapter presented the background, problem, research question, definitions, and delimitations and limitations. In Chapter II, I provide an analysis of the literature related to the topic. Chapter III is a description of the research design and methods. In Chapters IV and V, I present the findings from the data analysis and connect the findings to the literature and theoretical framework. Chapter V also includes recommendations for future research and implications for practice.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review of related literature covers factors pertaining to the persistence of African American males at community colleges. This is a very important issue with African American males being the largest minority group departing community college before obtaining a degree. The factors investigated within this study were academic, institutional, environmental, background/defining, social, and psychological.

EBSCO search engine was the main search tool used for this study. Terms and phrases such as persistence, African American male in community colleges, factors pertaining to persistence of African American males, African American educators in higher education, and institutional factors pertaining to persistence were used in locating material for this study. Another search of key scholars was used as well; some of those scholars were J. Luke Wood, Terrell Strayhorn, Sean Harper, and H. P. Mason.

There are six headings for the review of related literature in this study. The headings cover historical overview, community college, black males in higher education, persistence in higher education, factors influencing persistence, and summary. There are approximately 26 reviews of literature used in the study. The literature reviews were used to discuss the persistence factors pertaining to African American male students at community colleges. There is a dire need for studies covering this minority group

because they are the leading group of students departing community colleges before completing their degree programs (Wood & Williams, 2013).

Historical Overview

The earliest institutions of higher learning in the United States were modeled after such institutions as Oxford and Cambridge Universities in England (Stoeckel, 1976). Nine colonial colleges started as postsecondary institutions. The nine colonial colleges were Princeton, Harvard, Yale, Penn, Dartmouth, Columbia, Brown, College of William and Mary, and Rutgers University. All of the colonial colleges were considered Ivy League except two, which were the College of William and Mary and Rutgers University (Stoeckel, 1976). Trow (1988) discussed how the United States had nine colonial colleges compared to England, which had two: Cambridge and Oxford.

Attending one of the earliest establishments of higher education was limited to a specific demographic of people: the white, wealthy class (Archibald, 2002; Brickman, 1972). The white men who were able to pursue their postsecondary education had the choices of laymen or politicians (Trow, 1988). These institutions were small in stature with a limited curriculum of instruction (Frederick, 1991).

As America grew in independence, the landmark bill called the Morrill Land Act of 1862 had an impact on postsecondary education (Nemec, 2006). This Act donated public land to many states in the United States to create institutions of higher learning (Archibald, 2002; Nemec, 2006). With the formation of these land grant institutions, agricultural and engineering programs emerged (Nemec, 2006).

After almost a century of higher education in the United States, Herbold (1994) discussed how the Government Issue (GI) Bill was created to help the veterans after World War II. It provided financial support for veterans desiring to attend postsecondary education. Although the GI Bill provided opportunity for white veterans, black veterans were faced with limited education and overcrowding of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs; Herbold, 1994; Jenkins, 1946). A survey of historically black colleges in 1945 found that 45% of institutions enrolled fewer than 250, and fewer than 1000 students enrolled in 92% of HBCUs (Jenkins, 1946). Jenkins explained that the reason behind the low enrollment numbers at HBCUs was the limited access to housing available.

The creation of HBCUs grew from the demand of the black population in response to the limited access to the white colleges and universities (Sissoko & Liang-Rong, 2005). Nazaryan (2015) discussed how the United Negro College Funds benefited these institutions of higher learning, which were responsible for producing about 70% of all black dentists and doctors, 50% of black engineers and teachers, and 35% of black lawyers. Black graduates from HBCUs demonstrated a higher sense of purpose, as well as greater social, financial, and community involvement (Goode, 2015). With the creation of community colleges, there was a decline in enrollment at HBCUs (Sissoko & Liang-Rong, 2005).

Community College

A community college is any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

These institutions were created to provide services such as academic transfer, vocational-technical, continuing education, and developmental education (Koos, 1924, Ells, 1931, and Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

With the growing diversity of avenues offered at community colleges, a diversity of races were enabled to pursue their educational endeavors (Woods, Hilton, & Lewis, 2011; Woods, 2012; Strayhorn, 2012). These established institutions played an important role in maintaining persistence (Jenkins, 2007). Jenkins used longitudinal student unit record to demonstrate the effectiveness of individual student characteristics on institutional outcomes. The finding indicated that minority students are more likely to succeed at college if they are made to feel welcome. The significance of the study examined how student support service policies need to be aligned throughout a system to work (Jenkins, 2007).

As the growth of community colleges continued, there was an increase in the diversity of the student population. The enrollment number of African American males at community colleges was 408,444 during the school year of 2013 (AACC, 2015). In looking at the composition of community colleges, one has to ponder the concept of student persistence. Durkheim (1953) considered society as a whole and examined the interconnection between individuals and their surroundings. In a similar way, the students and their community colleges are interconnected; in order for both the students and the institution to grow and flourish, one must work with the other.

In working towards change in the view of community colleges, Miller and Deggs (2012) used the conceptual Model of Community Expectancy. This model states that

community agencies influence beliefs, values, actions, and behaviors, and identify formation at both the individual and group level. These agencies play a dominant role in the outcome of the individuals they encounter. Community colleges have a long history of providing the resources and muscle necessary for individuals to grow and make a difference in their communities (Miller & Deggs, 2012). Jenkins (2007) states that colleges can and do change the way they operate, but bringing about such a change may require some internal or external catalyst.

Although the growth of community colleges started with the formation of Joliet College (Cohen & Brawer, 2003), it was not until the introduction of the GI bill that the student enrollment started to grow at these institutions (Mellow, 2000). Community colleges provided military veterans an outlet for higher education. The growth of community colleges allowed for the advancement in certification, transfer to a baccalaureate program at a university, or completing an associate degree (Mellow, 2000).

African American Males in Higher Education

African American male scholars in higher education have led the field in research to identify persistence factors of Black males at community colleges (Harris & Harper, 2008; Strayhorn, 2012; Wood & Williams, 2013). Mason (1998) was one of the earliest scholars who saw the need to determine factors of persistence with African American males. His study focused on the underlying reasoning behind their departure from community colleges.

Wood and Harris (2013) have published numerous articles on persistence of African American males as well as factors relating to their persistence. His works are

detailed in nature and cover vast areas of the persistence of this minority group.

Strayhorn (2012) discussed how social integration was a negative predictor of African American male satisfaction at 2-year institutions. Harris and Harper (2008) identified four factors related to masculine student success: perception of school, desire to engage in competition, being the head of a family, and avoiding getting help.

Stephens and Harper (2012) examined the area of increasing enrollment and the diversity of the student body. These authors discussed the methods that institutions could incorporate to encourage students to persist in spite of the diversity many will encounter upon entering the college scene. A main theme of the book is student engagement and its importance to persistence.

Persistence in Higher Education

Mason (1998) focused on determining the underlying reasons for the departure of African American male students from community college. This study took place in a Chicago neighborhood, which consisted of 97% African Americans, and 70% of the community was considered below poverty. The following variables were identified with the departure of African American males: background, academic, and environmental.

This study determined there was a real need for retention research by urban colleges. There is a substantial need in research to determine the persistence and completion rates of African American males at community college (Mason, 1998). The need arises because of the low retention rate of African American males at community colleges compared to other ethnic groups (Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2007; Mason, 1998).

Urias and Wood (2014) examined the graduation rate of African American males in public 2-year, degree granting institutions. The aim was to determine the impact institutions play on the persistence of students. Data were derived using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) from 646 public 2-year community colleges. The results proved that African American males were more likely to persist at institutions with higher full time attendance. Another finding was rural college towns had higher graduation rates. The findings from this study could be implemented in policy plans for administrations (Strayhorn, 2012; Urias & Wood, 2014).

There is a limited amount of literature that estimates the influence of various factors on the retention of African American males at 2-year community colleges (Strayhorn, 2012; Urias & Wood, 2014; Wood, 2013). Strayhorn (2012) attempted to measure the relationship between academic and social integration factors and satisfaction with colleges. Family responsibility was the only external commitment variable that might influence one's schoolwork.

Student persistence is an important issue in community colleges. Nakajima, Dembo, and Mossler (2012) extended the research on student persistence by examining the following factors: demographic, academic, financial, and psychosocial. Four hundred twenty seven community college students completed the sample. The results demonstrated that age, financial status, and hours worked influenced the persistence of students; however, the results diminished when other variables were calculated.

Factors Influencing Persistence

A study by Wood (2013) examined personal goals as motivation factors for academic achievement among African American males in community colleges. This study used the self-determination theory. The self-determination theory sought to determine whether self-efficacy had an effect on integration for African American male students at community colleges. This theory focused on assertion of an individual to persist when a challenge is placed before him.

Wood, Newman, and Harris (2013) performed a study to examine the effect of academic self-efficacy on academic integration in the community college among first year African American male students. This qualitative research was significant because very little research had focused on self-efficacy on African American men in community colleges. The researchers used the psychological model of college student retention as their framework.

Urias and Wood (2014) examined African American male graduation rates in public 2-year degree granting institutions. The focus was on the role that institutions can have on facilitating differential outcomes for African American males. Data were gathered from the IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System). It was taken from a final population of institutions comprising 646 public 2-year degrees. The results demonstrated a difference between the Southeast regions, with average graduation rates of 18.57%, compared to New England regions, which have average African American male graduation rates at 6.47%.

With the issue of persistence, Wood (2012a) examined academic variables affecting the persistence and attainment of African American male college students. The

aim of the study was to analyze the academic variables. Grade point average, major change, and informal meetings with faculty were some of the academic variables examined. The findings from this study offered ideas for administration and other student support services personnel.

Academic success has been an issue for African American males at community colleges (Strayhorn, 2012; Wood, 2012a). Persistence has been demonstrated to be a positive indicator in the attainment of degrees (Wood, 2012). Another factor demonstrated is the interaction between faculty and students; it showed a positive indicator of persistence (Bush & Bush, 2010; Strayhorn, 2012; Wood, 2012b). The knowledge of the academic persistence of black males could be used for administrators and student services personnel.

Nakajima et al. (2012) extended the research on student persistence in community colleges by investigating factors likely to influence a student's decision to drop out or stay in school. Specifically, their study examined demographic, financial, academic, academic integration, and psychosocial variables and their relationship to student persistence. The study revealed that almost all of the variables interrelate with one another.

When building their goals for tomorrow, the cultural aspect of the African American male is vital to their achievement of degree attainment. Wells (2008) examined the influences of social and cultural capital on persistence for first and second year students. This study sought to establish a greater understanding of the ways that social class might affect student persistence and delineate possible ways that the persistence-

decision process may play in either overcoming social barriers or reinforcing them. Social and cultural aspects positively affect persistence from first and second years in postsecondary education. These variables have a smaller positive effect on persistence in community colleges than they do on persistence in 4-year institutions.

Wells (2008) used data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study; these data expanded from 1988 to 1994. The data did not support variables to represent academic or social integration in college because students who did not persist more commonly did not have data for these types of variables. The research determined that students with higher levels of valued social and cultural capital were more likely to persist from the first to the second year of college. Students who began at community colleges did not, on average, have lowered system-wide persistence rates than did students who began at 4-year institutions (Wells, 2008; Wood, 2012).

Additionally, Wells (2008) had several findings related to persistence in community colleges. First, social and cultural capital are valuable constructs that can be used to disaggregate social class for quantitative research. Secondly, postsecondary systems as a whole need to continue working to retain students. Thirdly, there are differences in the way social and cultural factors affect community colleges and universities.

In providing an explanation as to persistence for African American male students, Strayhorn (2008) used Sanford's (1962) notion of challenge and support. This theory was created to provide readiness, challenge, and support. Strayhorn used Sanford and Tinto's theory of retention, which aimed to determine if supportive relationships of faculty and

staff had an effect on the success of persistence of African American male community college students. The results showed supportive relationships displayed a higher level of satisfaction (Strayhorn, 2008).

The persistence of African American males to achieve academically was motivational towards their focus to success (Mason, 1998; Wood, 2010; Wood & Palmer, 2013). In looking at the academic success of African American males, their level of satisfaction has been studied (Mason, 1998; Strayhorn, 2012; Urias & Wood, 2012). There is extant research available connecting self-efficacy to student success (Wood, 2015).

There is a link between society and choice of colleges (Joshi, 2009). The study findings stated that African American male students from families with medium and higher incomes are more likely to choose a 4-year institution. On the other hand, the students who work many hours select a community college. He postulated that the important policy is to provide financial assistance to the students who are aiming at achieving a postsecondary education.

Settle (2011) used data from the Beginning Postsecondary Longitudinal Study (BPS) to understand patterns of educational attainment and persistence. The data analysis included descriptive statistics and logistic regression. This study was important because it provided a model to estimate the persistence of first generation students at 2-year colleges. There were differences in the variables affecting first generation and continuing generation students at community colleges. The research questions focused on the socioeconomic status of the student and social capital.

Strayhorn (2011) investigated the relationship between background traits, initial commitments, and satisfaction among African Americans attending 2-year community colleges. His study represented an initial investigation into the role that background traits and commitments play on African American students' satisfaction at these institutions. The sample size for this study was approximately 5,193 students. The Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CCSEQ) was used to collect data for study. The questionnaire consisted of 191 items that elicited information about the quality of students' experiences in the community college environment.

These researchers identified that background traits and initial commitments are statistically indicators of African American students' satisfaction with their community college experience. Age was significantly related to college satisfaction among these students. Another finding was that family responsibilities negatively impacted students' evaluation of their college experiences (Strayhorn, 2011).

With the growing desire for institutions to understand the persistence of African American males, the government enacted the Federal TRIO programs (TRIO). This is a federal outreach and student service program that provides assistance to the economically disadvantaged, first generation college students, and individuals with disabilities (; Cole, 1998; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). The formation of the TRIO program developed as a result of the large number of African American males starting their postsecondary education at community colleges, but few persisting (Bush & Bush, 2005; Wood & Turner, 2011; Wood, 2012a).

Wood and Palmer's (2013) study investigated the personal goals of African American male community college students. This study was carried out using the BPS, which compared African American male community college students to white male community college students. The purpose was to engage students towards their short-term and long-term goals. By determining the goals of these students, the professors were able to engage and motivate them. This study is significant because it revealed that there is limited research focusing on personal goals of African American males in community college.

With the growing number of African American male students not completing community college, Wood (2011a) focused on the factors that surround their departure from their respective institutions. He found that the following reasons were chief to their departure: family responsibility, program dissatisfaction, and other reasons. In looking at the family responsibility, this group was 394% greater than their other counterparts to leave college. Data were gathered for this study using 2004-2009 BPS. There were 2,235 respondents used in the study.

When African American males depart from community colleges, the institutions lose economic dollars. When making college choices, the financial focus is a key element. Phelan's (2014) investigation concluded that when finances are an issue, students are more likely to attend a community college. The impact of community college cost shapes not only selection choice, but the impact of success.

According to the Pew Research Center (2013), African American men are six times more likely than white men to be incarcerated. Moore (2015) report that there are 4

times more African American males are incarcerated than women. The growing number of African American men in the prison system demonstrates the need for African American men to be mentored. With the growing need to provide an atmosphere of learning, it is vital for faculty to create a student-centered environment (Bush & Bush, 2010; Wood, 2012).

Institutional Factors

Wood and Ireland (2014) examined the determinants of Black male students' interaction with faculty and staff. They discovered that age had a positive impact on engagement with the faculty. The researcher stressed the significance of orientation and study courses.

Urias and Wood (2014) investigated the graduation rate of Black male students at community colleges. The study was focused on identifying factors that determine the graduation rates of this select group of students. IPEDS was used for this study taken from 646 public community colleges. It was noted that rural, southeastern community colleges have higher graduation rates than urban and other geographical regions in the United States. This study discussed how Black males experience success based upon the institutional size. In other words, Urias and Wood (2014) explained the smaller the institution the greater the success rates for Black families. They discussed how the finding was beneficial to institutions as well as the families of the students when evaluating college choices.

In selecting community colleges, Wood and Harrison (2014) examined the process used for Black males in selecting their college of choice for post-secondary

education. They discuss factors such as easy admission and acceptance of transfer hours as factors involved in the selection process for Black males at community colleges. Their finding indicated that Black males selected community colleges based upon selected fields of study, availability of financial aid, job placement, and coursework/curriculum. Wood and Harrison (2014), Urias and Wood (2014), and Wood and Ireland (2014) have discussed factors involving Black males and their selection process.

Summary

Chapter II included seven sections detailing the creation of community college. After a brief description of community college, an historical description of higher education in the United States was provided. Community colleges' significance, African American males scholars, and factors involving the growth of these institutions of higher learning was provided.

Understanding the factors related to the persistence of African American males is vital to community colleges. Identifying plans in place and implementing new plans to increase persistence will help institutions of higher learning. College administrators and student services personnel are able to implement plans to help African American males reach their goals of persistence. To further ensure success, the training of faculty and staff about the academic, background/defining, environmental, social, and psychological variables of African American male students' persistence indicators will enable these personnel to work towards increasing the retention rate of this minority group.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore African American males' identification of the factors that influenced their community college persistence and, ultimately, their 4-year university enrollment. This study focused on African American males because they are the largest group of students departing community colleges without degree attainment (Wood & Harris, 2013). Much of the research on factors that influence African American male college persistence explore academic, background/defining, environmental, social, and institutional factors (Mason, 1998; Strayhorn, 2012; Wood & Williams, 2013). However, for this study, I used a more general exploration of factors as participants identified the factors they considered to be most important to their persistence.

In this chapter, I restate the research question and provide detailed explanations of the research design, the research site, methods used to select participants, procedures, data collection, data analysis, researcher's role, trustworthiness, and ethical issues.

Research Question

The study was guided by one main research question. The question, *What factors do African American males identify as most crucial to their persistence at a community*

college?, was exploratory in nature and allowed for broad discussions of persistence factors.

Research Design

At the proposal phase, the study's intended research design was a qualitative case study. Scholars have provided various definitions of the case study. For example, Stake (1995) revealed a case study is an investigation and analysis of a single or collective case intended to capture the complexity of the object of study. Similarly, Merriam (1998) and Merriam and Tisdell (2015) suggested the case study method allows a researcher to focus on selecting a single object and examining that object's particular situation. Also, in examining a case study, Merriam (1998) noted the case study is an explanation of a thing, a single entity, or a unit around which there are boundaries. Case studies are designed to suit the case (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014) and "How?" and "What?" research questions (Stake, 2000, 2009). In the search for meaning in a case, the researcher conducts semi-structured interviews, analyzes transcribed notes, and examines consistency among the data collected (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995).

The case study design was chosen as it was the intent to explore the perspectives of African American males who persisted at the same community college. This community college would have served as the "bounded system" through which to examine the African American males' perspectives. Unfortunately, due to some limitations, I was unable to access the participants through the community college and had to engage in other participant recruitment efforts. Another limitation of the study that impacted the use of a case study design was the triangulation of data, that is often is used

to substantiate design (Merriam, 1998). Working with the desired community college would have enabled me to collect data through multiple sources and to include documents and artifacts. This strategy also was not completed due to the problem of not being able to work with the community college. As a result, a general qualitative design was employed and data were collected primarily through individual, structured interviews.

Selection of Participants

The participants for the study were African American males who had completed their associate degree at a community college and were enrolled at a 4-year university located in the southern region of the United States. In the fall 2016 semester, the total student enrollment at the university was more than 21,000 students. There was increased racial and ethnic diversity of students on the campus during this semester as, according to the institution's published enrollment report, there was a 26% increase in African American student enrollment as full-time students and an overall 19% increase of African American students enrolled. During the time frame of July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016, there were 185 Bachelor's degrees awarded to African American male students at this research institution.

Because I was unable to recruit participants directly from the desired community college, I recruited participants from the university by posting flyers at various locations on campus (see Appendix B). The participants in the study contacted me using the information on the flyers. Once the participants confirmed they met the criteria for participation (i.e., completed an associate degree from a community college, identified as

black or African American), we arranged a date, time, and private location for the interviews. Participation in this study was on a voluntary basis.

Data Collection and Analysis

Stake (1995) contended data collection should be eclectic and encouraged the researcher to use all sources of data that are relevant to the research questions. Collecting data in this manner eases the data analysis process as the researcher has access to multiple forms of data. For this study, the data collection was carried out in an eclectic approach, and the data analysis was conducted holistically to identify themes (Stake, 1995).

The data were collected using face-to-face, structured interviews with African American males who graduated with an associate degree from a community college. Participants were interviewed for 45 – 60 minutes in a natural setting using open-ended questions (Creswell, 2013). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy.

In order to identify answers to the research question, a detailed qualitative data analysis process was employed after the interviews were transcribed. Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) discussed the process of searching for themes using a general analytic strategy. To engage in this process, I coded, categorized, and identified themes that emerged across the transcripts. Initially, codes were given to topics that appeared frequently throughout interviews and that related to the research question. These codes were reduced to themes. Creswell (2013) stated that themes are findings identified from multiple participants and are supported by varied quotations and detailed evidence. Also,

Tesch's (1990) steps to data analysis were very helpful as I combed through the transcripts. He outlined the following steps of data analysis (pp. 142-145):

1. Get a sense of the whole. Read all the transcriptions carefully.
2. Select one document. Ask questions pertaining to the document.
3. Make a list of the topics.
4. Take the list and review the data.
5. Select descriptive words for your topics and create categories for them.
6. Create abbreviation and codes for categories.
7. Categorized the information for each category.
8. If circumstances happen, recode the data.

Procedures

I conducted the study following a strategic set of procedures. These procedures are outlined in the list below.

- I presented a successful dissertation proposal defense in November, 2016.
- I submitted an application to Mississippi State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) in February, 2017 and received approval April, 2017 (IRB#16-687) (see Appendix C).
- I initiated contact with the community college in February, 2017 until April, 2017. I started first with an email introducing myself and my research topic. It was followed by numerous phones messages, voicemails, and email messages for approximately three months.

- I attempted to gain approval for use of the CCSM (Wood & Harris, 2013) through email from May, 2016 to September, 2016. After I was unable to obtain approval, I discussed with my chair the idea of recruiting participants through the use of flyers and the idea of conducting interviews. We agreed that these procedures would be acceptable due to circumstances beyond my control.
- I placed 65 flyers on the university campus and waited for interested African American males to contact me.
- Interested African American males contacted me and verified that they met the requirements for an academic associate degree and identified as African American. We then agreed on a day, time, and private location for the interviews. When the participants and I met for the interviews, they reviewed and signed the informed consent, completed the background questionnaire, and agreed to be audio-recorded.
- Interviews were conducted in June and July of 2017.
- I analyzed data in July, 2017 and wrote Chapters IV and V of the dissertation in August, 2017.
- I presented a successful final dissertation defense in September, 2017.

Researcher's Role

Creswell (2014) stated that the researcher was the primary instrument when conducting qualitative research. Therefore, I was the instrument for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Also, the main role of the researcher is to be responsible for

all procedures related to the study. There also are other roles related to subjectivity and working with the data.

The other roles related to subjectivity are projection, researcher bias, or researcher's own blindness to the research topic. Williams and Morrow (2009) explained the limitations of conducting qualitative research when researchers are not cognizant of their own blindness to the research topic. For example, I am the mother of African American sons and was interested in this topic, in part, due to my role as a mother. My fears as the researcher are transference or projection of my insecurity of not allowing my sons to be a part of the societal statistics concerning African American males. As the researcher, I examined the topic and refrained from incorporating my personal biases throughout the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Williams & Morrow, 2009). I monitored my personal biases by using a journal to identify my fears of feeling inferior as the mother of African American boys. I was careful not to transfer my fear to the participants and maintained a neutral mindset throughout the interview process.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (2002) described trustworthiness in the naturalist realm as displaying rigor with paradigm specific criteria. The paradigm specific criteria are credibility, transferability, conformability, and dependability. They stated that each researcher must have neutrality, applicability, consistency, and truth value. In order to produce a trustworthy study, I aimed to ensure the study was credible in its results. Internal consistency was demonstrated throughout the interview, data gathering, and coding. Systematic routines were carried out with each interview to establish a pattern of

consistency. I took a neutral stance during the interview process as well as data collection. The ultimate goal was to create an honest, reliable, and consistent study. The following were included within the study to ensure trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, conformability, and dependability.

- Credibility involves establishing that the results gathered within the study are believable (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In order to establish credibility, I utilized member checking, a process where participants are provided transcripts of the interviews for verification.
- Transferability describes the degree in which the researcher can transfer the information of the participants to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). While the emergent nature of qualitative research results in limited transferability, I provided specific details related to all procedures followed for the study. In addition to outlining the process of data collection and analysis, I noted the steps followed for identifying and selecting participants.
- Confirmability is the qualitative equivalent to the quantitative concept of internal validity (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). To maintain confirmability, I explored how research findings are supported by the data collected and discussed how my subjectivities and personal assumptions were identified and monitored.
- Dependability is the alternative to reliability and ensures that the research findings are consistent and could be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The following aspects were taken into consideration when considering dependability: how the research is conducted and analyzed, and the presentation of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

In accordance with IRB use of human subjects, steps were taken to ensure the confidentiality, privacy, and rights of the participants in the research study. Approval for the research was granted before any data was obtained. Each participant was given a detailed explanation of the research study as well as a copy of their consent form before the start of the study.

There were no visible risks or ethical dilemmas present for participants in the study. The participants were not required to answer any questions that might lead to unethical replies. To ensure confidentiality of participants' identities, participants were assigned a different Greek letter for their name. As required by IRB, the data were stored in a fireproof, locked safe. The data will be kept in locked storage for three years. At the end of that time, the information will be shredded and placed in the trash. The audio tapes will be destroyed.

Summary

Chapter III included eight sections detailing the research design used in this qualitative study. After a brief description of research design, I provided substantial information on selection of participants, data collection and analysis, procedures, researcher's role, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

I also described the research design approach in detail along with an explanation of the data analysis process used in this research study. When considering the ethical aspect of the study, special attention was given to address the researcher's bias. Another

aspect discussed in the study was achievement of trustworthiness in the use of qualitative research.

In examining the data derived from the taped interviews, literature review, and the research method, the next chapter discusses the findings of the study along with a brief description of the seven participants used in the study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore African American males' identification of the factors that contributed to their persistence at community colleges. Data were collected through structured interviews with 7 African American male community college graduates who were enrolled at a 4-year university when the study was conducted. Data were analyzed through a process of coding and categorizing in order to determine themes. The theoretical framework used to ground the analysis consisted of Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) Theory of Social Integration and Bandura's (1991, 1997) Social Cognitive Model. Tinto's discussion of student integration into college life socially and academically provided a better insight on persistence for African American male students. Bandura's Social Cognitive Model was used to obtain an understanding of participants' self-efficacy and determination to reach their goals.

In this chapter, I provide a comprehensive description of the study's participants and report the findings. Specifically, I restate the research question, include a participant profile for each participant, discuss the findings related to the research question, and provide a summary.

Research Question

The study was guided by one main research question. The question, *What factors do African American males identify as most crucial to their persistence at a community college?*, was exploratory in nature and allowed for broad discussions of persistence factors.

Participant Profiles

The study consisted of seven participants who participated voluntarily in face-to-face, structured interviews. To ensure confidentiality of participants' identities, each participant was assigned a number and Greek letter to be used as identifiers. All descriptions reflect participants' identities at the time this chapter was written and revised, August – October, 2017.

Participant #1 Alpha. Alpha was a 21-year-old senior in the fall of 2017 with a major in and focus on education. After obtaining his high school diploma, he elected to attend community college. He received an associate degree from a community college within 2 years before transferring to the university to continue his education. Both of his parents have some postsecondary education, with his mother having a master's degree and his father an associate's degree. With the educational background of his parents, Alpha defined his family's socioeconomic status as upper middle class.

Participant #2 Beta. Beta was a 23-year-old graduating senior in the fall of 2017. He started community college immediately after receiving his high school diploma and stated he was an outgoing student while attending his community college. He served as Mr. Community College at his institution of choice and completed his graduation

requirements within two years. Beta described his family's socioeconomic status as lower income. His father completed an eighth grade education and receives monthly government assistance. His mother obtained a high school diploma.

Participant #3 Gamma. Gamma was a 19-year-old sophomore attending the university. He completed two years at a community college after receiving his high school diploma. Both of his parents received only a high school diploma. Gamma stated they are considered financially poor and receive government assistance. His associate's degree was received in physical education.

Participant #4 Delta. Delta was a 20-year-old junior attending the university and majoring in business administration. After receiving his diploma from high school, he went on to attend community college and completed an associate's degree in business administration. He described his family's socioeconomic status as lower income.

Participant #5 Epsilon. Epsilon was a 20-year-old sophomore attending the university of his choice after completing one year at the local community college. He obtained his associate degree in one year because of the dual credit courses taken during high school. Dual credit courses are classes taken that will count both in secondary and postsecondary education (Crockett-Bell, 2010). His major was agriculture at both institutions. Both of his parents obtained associate's degrees with his mother having two degrees. He described his family's socioeconomic status as middle class.

Participant #6 Zeta. Zeta is a 20-year-old sophomore attending the university after completing two years at the community college, where he received an associate's

degree in Business Administration. Neither of Zeta’s parents completed formal education after high school. He described his family’s socioeconomic status as lower income.

Participant #7 Eta. Eta is a participant who elected to pursue dual enrollment credits while attending high school. Because of using this option, he was able to complete community college within a year after receiving his high school diploma. This opportunity afforded him the reward of an associate’s degree within a year of postsecondary enrollment. His family is his driving force, with both his parents receiving Bachelor of Science degrees and the family being of middle class socioeconomic status.

In addition to a brief narrative describing each participant, Table 1 presents visually the characteristics for each participant.

Table 1

Participants of the Study

Name	Age	Major	Parents’ Education	Self-Reported Socioeconomic Status
Alpha	21	Education	M: Master’s F: Associate’s	Upper Middle Income
Beta	23	Psychology	M: HS Diploma F: 8 th Grade	Lower Income
Gamma	19	Education	M: HS Diploma F: HS Diploma	Lower Income
Delta	20	Business Administration	M: HS Diploma F: HS Diploma	Lower Income
Epsilon	20	Agriculture	M: Associate’s (2) F: Associate’s	Middle Income
Zeta	20	Business Administration	M: HS Diploma F: HS Diploma	Lower Income

Eta	21	Education – Chemistry	M: Bachelor of Science F: Bachelor of Science	Middle Income
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Four of the seven participants identified as being from families with lower income socioeconomic status. The parents' education varied with four mothers having a high school diploma, one mother having two associate's degrees, one mother having a bachelor's degree, and one mother having a master's degree. On average, the fathers had slightly lower levels of education with one father having completed the eighth grade, three fathers having a high school diploma, two fathers having an associate's degree, and 1 father having a bachelor's degree. The participants ranged in age from 19 to 23, with an average age of 21. The major programs of study were education, business administration, agriculture, and psychology.

Findings

The findings that emerged from this describe the educational experiences of seven African American male students who completed community colleges and, at the time of the study, were enrolled in a 4-year university. The data explain the experience that each participant encountered, their motivation, and their reasoning for persisting through community college and pursuing their bachelor's degrees. The findings were structured around one main research question: *What factors do African American males identify as most crucial to their persistence at a community college?* In order to answer this question, structured interviews were conducted where I asked two general questions and several follow-up, specific questions. The general questions asked included the following:

1. What were the factors that inspired you to persist in completing community college and motivate you to continue your academic studies?
2. What allowed you to persist in your studies?

Additional questions focused on students' perceptions regarding the academic, background/defining, and environmental factors. These areas were the foci as it became apparent during the interviews that most participants attributed their persistence to these factors. Ten additional questions were asked to explore these areas, for a total of 12 interview questions.

During the analysis of the data, special attention was given to themes that indicated persistence of the participant through their educational journey. Classified themes were categorized from the transcribed semi-structured, interviews given for each participant. Important themes were marked that the participant considered or thought of as significant (Stake, 1995). Specially, when several participants repeatedly discussed an event or factor relating to their persistence, this event was coded and eventually marked as a theme if repetition was present.

After analyzing the transcribed interviews, the general answers to the research question were family and a desire to improve their lives. Specifically, participants indicated they were motivated to be persistent due to family examples, sacrifices, and nurturing, as well as their desire to contribute positively to society and prepare themselves to live in a better environment than which they had lived. This finding is reflected by Theme 1: Family and Better Life. In addition to identifying their families and desires for a better life as the most crucial factors to consider in their persistence,

participants also expressed specific ways that academic, background/defining, and environmental factors influenced their persistence. Subthemes emerged to support the initial theme. These subthemes include a focus on the academic, background/defining, and environmental factors. Specifically, the subthemes are Subtheme 1a: Balance and Support, Subtheme 1b: Walking in and Beyond Parents' Footsteps, and Subtheme 1c: Improving Finances, Dispelling Stereotypes. The main theme and three subthemes are discussed in detail in the following paragraphs. Specific quotes from the participants are included as examples of statements that led to the themes.

Theme 1: Family and Better Life

Family and the drive for a better life were evident in the remarks made by several participants. When asked directly about the factors that most impacted their persistence, all participants noted being motivated by the sacrifices and encouragement of their parents.

My family is the reason I strive. [Specifically,] My mother was an inspiration in which she stated that temporary sacrifices in education would be a lifetime of benefits. She talked about the loans made to fulfill her education and her focus on obtaining a master's degree. With all the hard work taken in her life, the academic motivation she inspired within me has always been a vital key.

My parents are persistence. They are the reason I grind and push myself to make something out of my life because we know what it means to struggle and I am pushing for my family to enjoy the better benefits of life.

Um... I feel that my father sacrificed enough for me to get to this point and that it is my responsibility to strive to excel academically to honor the price that he paid in order for me to go tuition free. [...] My father completed two tours of duty in Afghanistan to enable me to attend the college of my choice on his Government Issued Bill (GI Bill). It was through my father's dedication to his country that I am able to pursue my love of agriculture.

My parents allowed me to persist in my studies. They have always informed me at an early age that I was going to college and graduate from college as they did.

Several participants explained their desire for a better life as a motivating factor and discussed experiences in their lives that had a profound impact on them. For example, some participants described growing up in drug-infested or poverty-stricken environments. These factors prompted their search for a better life. Gamma described his introduction to the drug life and the life-changing circumstances that shaped his destination. Participant Gamma stated:

The week after my high school graduation, I thought that life was all that I desired and wanted. I had gotten connected with a local drug dealer to make money before the start of community college. It was a month after dealing, that I witnessed my best friend trying the drug that we was selling overdose in front of me.

He went on to discuss how the mental and spiritual impact of the experience motivated him to transform his objectives in life. Gamma further explained:

... [T]here is more to life than trying to sell drugs or hustle. Without an education, your choices of lifestyles are limited, so I knew an education would offer me a better life and in return enable me to help my folks.

Participant Alpha noted that his father's discussion of the environment that he grew up in was a major factor in Alpha's persistence as he understood his father's sacrifices and environment.

My dad talked about the prospect of being a new father inspired him to do better in life. While a freshman at community college, my father talked about his former high school classmate that was murdered trying to stop a fight in his neighborhood while home from college. It was those turning impact that drove my father to want a better life and remove himself from a detrimental environment with the increase in crime and gun violence.

Subtheme 1a: Balance and support. The focus on academic factors revealed participants' perceptions of the importance of a balanced course load, adequate counseling, time management, and study groups. As such, the theme for academic factors is Subtheme 1a: Balance and Support.

All participants noted that the number of hours they took each semester had an impact on their ability to balance their academics, and the ability to balance their academics contributed to their persistence. Alpha stated, "I am motivated to excel and achieve my degree by keeping at least 15 hours or more each semester."

Another important aspect of balancing included participants' studying and planning for course work. Participant Alpha indicated time management was important. Other participants made similar statements and noted the value of study groups, use of the library, etc.

I use all my available time studying. I plan study groups with people in my classes and use the library to study alone when I have an exam.

I allow myself enough time to study and be well prepared for my classes by going to the library to study whenever it's needed.

I usually go to the library or use a study group. I like going to the library and it is my way of making sure I get some study time into my schedule. It is difficult to achieve a passing grade if I do not take the time to study to prepare for my classes. The library offers me quiet time and few distractions to prepare and study for classes in order that grades might reflect my determination.

I use study groups for my classes I am having difficulty in trying to prepare and the others I assign myself library time to go study.

In addition to study groups and the library, the participants' persistence was nurtured by academic counseling and tutoring services. Most of the participants agreed that academic counseling and tutoring helped them stay focused on their academics and complete their programs in a timely manner. Alpha described academic counseling as "necessary," and Zeta stated the academic counseling was "helpful in guiding [him] in the right direction" and "It helped because I needed the guidance to make sure I was

taking the appropriate classes.” Other participants reiterated these perceptions of the importance of academic counseling.

I feel that it was very vital, the counselor was very considerate and guided me.

For me, being a student with no guidance or direction about a major, it was my advisor that talked about following a love for something. He eventually led me to change my major to agriculture and the love of nature has only grown within me.

Conversely, not all participants indicated the academic counseling was as helpful as they would have liked. Specifically, Beta indicated academic counseling “was helpful, [but] then I realized that some academic counselors [are] not really focused on your studies and have you taking classes that will not transfer or you just don’t need.”

Similarly, Gamma stated, “I think that some academic counselors do not help you or make sure that you are on the right track.”

Tutoring, study groups, and help from faculty also were noted important factors. Participants contended that they actively sought academic assistance when needed from individual tutors, other students, and faculty. The use of study groups was most prevalent.

I have never had a problem with getting help from my teachers. If I have a problem, they are the experts to guide me in solving the problem. I refuse to be struggling in a class and knowing that I have teachers or study groups available to help me.

My success in the classroom is the ultimate achievement I need in order to graduate. There was an occasion in which I attended tutoring groups to get extra help in Organic Chemistry. I believed that no matter the class, your main goal should be to get all the information it has to offer and if you need assistance to ask for help. The end result of my tutoring was for me to gain a passing grade in the class and to get a better understanding of the material that I did not understand.

However, a few students noted their preference for study groups over individual tutors. Participant Epsilon explained, “I didn’t have a problem asking for help. I just do not feel comfortable going to a tutor getting help. I would rather use the library and study groups.” This participant further elaborated, “I love to use study groups, but tutors I do not like because I feel uncomfortable with just one person and I get the feeling of inferior[ity]. I know it’s crazy but that’s the way I feel.”

Subtheme 1b: Walking in and Beyond Parents’ Footsteps. The focus on background/defining factors revealed participants’ perceptions that age was not a consideration in whether or not they persisted and that their parents set the examples for their success. No matter the parents’ educational levels, the participants wanted to achieve more than or as much as their parents. Therefore, the theme to explain the findings for background/defining factors is Theme 3: Walking in and Beyond Parents’ Footsteps.

An example of a quote supporting this theme was provided by Beta , who revealed, “My parents’ lack of a degree is my driving force to reach my degree requirements.” Similarly, Eta explained his parents’ educational attainment was “a

driving force because I know they did not receive nothing but a high school diploma.”

Also, several of the participants maintained their desire to have more than their parents in order to fulfill the dreams their parents might have had for themselves.

[My parents] have pushed me to worked towards my goal. I come from a small town that had little to nothing and somehow my mom made me believe after all the times telling me what I could become one day in life. It was her message, “You will graduate and make something out of yourself with the Lord’s will.”

[My parents] are my motivation. I come from parents that had limited education and the only thing I can do is strive to do better with my life. Every time I succeed in life, it is a sign of what my folks made in me.

[My parents] both got associates, and they wanted me to get a bachelor degree. It is the reality of my father putting his life on the line in order for me to get a free education and it is only right that I do what I need to do to make my parents proud of me.

Participants explained their parents’ life challenges as factors to support the participants wanting more education and advancement. Epsilon discussed a divine intervention on which he based his desire to do well. Participant Epsilon revealed:

... [I]t was the circumstances of life that enabled me to block out the negativity of my environment. I was the third pregnancy for my mother after two miscarriages, and she always believed that God showed favor upon me. She was not able to conceive another child but had another miscarriage after me. I look at my life and

the impact of my surrounding and know that through God's grace and mercy that he found favor that I may continue the path he predestined for me.

Alpha recalled the struggles of his mother to get her college degree. It was perseverance as a young mother, working and making financial debt to complete her goal to better her family's life that inspired him to this day to do his best. He recalled:

...this was a woman that had me during her sophomore year at college. Her mother, who was a single parent, allowed her to come home and have me that summer and go back to school that fall. She stayed with my father, who only attended the local community college, and started working to help my grandmother with me. Both my grandmother and father saw the potential within my mother to go on and complete her Masters in Accountancy. My mother turned a situation she could have been a statistic into an opportunity of empowerment for me to strive academically.

This subtheme revealed how participants wanted to achieve more academically than their parents, even for those with higher education, as homage to the lived experiences of the parents.

Subtheme 1c: Improving Finances, Dispelling Stereotypes. The focus on environmental factors revealed participants were motivated by financial reasons and the desire to dispel stereotypes. Some of the participants were employed at the time of the study, and many discussed the financial challenges their families face. In addition, most participants discussed their desire to disprove negative stereotypes of African American

men as a motivating factor for them to succeed. Thus, the theme to explain the findings for environmental factors is Theme 4: Improving Finances, Dispelling Stereotypes.

The financial background of the participants varied. Participant Beta indicated he was employed as a student because his parents were not able to assist him financially as they were on “Social Security and fixed income.” Participant Gamma noted, “Without the job working at the gas station, I would not be able to depend on anyone else. And I do not want to take out too many loans.” Similar to Beta and Gamma, participant Delta also relied on support from sources other than his family. Participant Delta reported:

I depend upon student loan and work study. Um... my uncles feel that I should be a provider for my parents financially now by working at home in the local factory. There was a time at the start of my first semester after transferring, I considered moving home to work in the factory. It was a talk with my parents that told to focus on graduating and stop worrying about talk about my relatives.

A particularly memorable statement regarding the role of financial status as a motivating factor to persist was provided by Alpha , who explained:

Life is hell when you come from nothing and the only way is to look up. . . .Um, I come from an environment in which it was always a constant struggle to maintain the necessities of life. My parents had to think about what was most vital to the family in the aspect of limited funds. I have been on government assistance my whole life, and I made a personal vow to remove myself from a life of constant struggle. I bet you can imagine living in the ‘hood where it is easier to make a quick dollar than strive the honest way. As a man, I made up in my mind early in

life that through education it would return a positive profit in the aspect of helping my parents and making them proud.

Conversely to these participants, participants Epsilon, Zeta, and Eta reported they did not work in order to focus on their education. While Zeta reported his family's financial status as lower income, both Epsilon and Eta reported their family's financial status as middle income. This reveals that financial status is a factor to consider as very often those students with more financial means are able to focus on their education without maintaining employment. All of the participants, no matter their families' financial status, suggested one of the factors that contributed to their persistence was the desire to improve their financial status.

Another area related to this subtheme is the participants' desire to use their education to combat negative stereotypes of African American men. The desire to dispel African American male stereotypes served as an additional factor fostering persistence. Participant Epsilon contended, "I try to use negative stereotypes as motivation to achieve." Participant Alpha provided additional support when he stated, "As a black male, my focus is to push past the statistics." Other participants provided statements indicating their desire to dispel African American male stereotypes.

I use the media as my driving force to succeed. The media talks about everything that many say black males cannot do or is doing wrong. I proving people wrong, some of my family said I would be a teen father early in life and a high school dropout. I am neither, instead I am pushing my continuous to make something out of my life.

I have not had the experience of encountering negative stereotypes, but I do know that as a black man that media such as news or television say that I will go to jail, have multiple baby mommas, or sell drugs. I have did neither.

Participants' statements on this theme reveal their desire to improve their financial status and dispel the negative stereotypes regarding African American males. As such, the participants noted these factors were vital to their persistence. Having varying financial backgrounds did not deter the participants from wanting improved financial status. All wanted to work hard and increase their individual finances and those of their families.

Summary

This chapter presents the findings for the research question posed for this study. The data analysis process revealed one main theme and three subthemes to answer the research question. The themes explain participants' perceptions of factors that influenced their persistence to completion during their community college enrollment.

The next chapter, Chapter V, includes the discussion of the findings related to the literature and theoretical framework.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study addressed African American male students' identification of persistence factors influencing them to complete their academic associate's degrees at community colleges.

Chapter I included the study's introduction, problem background, purpose of the study, theoretical framework, definition of terms, limitation, and delimitations. The significance of research also was discussed and determined to be rooted in the limited studies that provide qualitative narratives of African American males' perspectives regarding the factors related to their persistence.

Chapter II is a review of the literature, where I discussed the historical overview of community college as well as foci on African American or Black males' experiences in higher education. I also examined the literature related to general persistence and specific persistence factors identified by previous research.

In Chapter III, I focused on the qualitative research design and specifically outlined the challenges with implementing the initial qualitative case study design as planned originally. I also provided specific details on the revised data collection and analysis procedures.

In Chapter IV, I outlined the findings resulting from the data analysis and provided detailed participant quotes to support the themes identified. There was one main

theme and three subthemes identified through the data analysis process. This theme and the subsequent subthemes are Theme 1: Family and Better Life, Subtheme 1a: Balance and Support, Subtheme 1b: Walking in and Beyond Parents' Footsteps, and Subtheme 1c: Improving Finances, Dispelling Stereotypes.

Finally, in Chapter V, I offered the discussion, conclusion, implications, and recommendations for further research. Specifically, in the discussion I explained the findings related to the research question. I also provided a depth to the understanding of significance of the findings related to the literature and theoretical framework. I then provided concluding thoughts on the study prior to stating specific potential implications for practice and recommendations for future research driven by the findings and limitations of the current study. Specific sections included the Review of Research Design, Discussion, Conclusion, Implications for Practice, and Recommendations for Future Research.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors influencing African American male persistence in community college. The study examined a small number of African American male students who completed community college before transferring to the 4-year university from which the sample was recruited. The aim was to identify factors that might influence persistence at community colleges for African American males. While the intent was to study general factors as identified by the participants, some focus on specific factors included the academic, background/defining, and environmental factors. Psychological, social, and institutional factors were not addressed specifically, and, thus, should be considered in further research. The study was guided by one main research

question: *What factors do African American males identify as most crucial to their persistence at a community college?*

There is a problem in the retention of African American male students at community colleges (Strayhorn, 2012; Urias & Woods, 2014; Wood & Williams, 2013). In identifying persistence factors, this study provided an understanding of the gap in research related to African American male student persistence at community colleges. The gap outlined in this study focused on persistence factors that contributed to African American male students' success in graduating with an associate's degree and exploring their achievement level in a university setting.

Findings focused on one main theme and three subthemes. Specifically, African American male students credited their families, the desire for a better life, finances, and disproving stereotypes about African American men as primary factors that influenced them to persist in their community college programs. Theme 1: Family and Better Life, Subtheme 1a: Balance and Support, Subtheme 1b: Walking in and Beyond Parents' Footsteps, and Subtheme 1c: Improving Finances, Dispelling Stereotypes were the specific theme and subthemes identified. The following discussion notes how these factors relate to the literature and theoretical framework.

Theme 1: Family and Better Life

The role family plays in the participants' lives was self-evident in their transcribed interviews. Epsilon talked about his father's expectation of his getting a quality education to the point that he participated in two military tours in order to enable Epsilon to obtain a free education. Alpha's life was impacted by his parents' desire to obtain an education and to use their past as motivational tools. Conversely, some family

members expected the participants to remain in their hometowns and be employed locally. This was the case for Gamma, whose uncles tried to encourage him to give up his educational dream in exchange for employment. Each participant mentioned various family expectations, but it was their motivation to excel academically that inspired them to obtain their associate's degree from a community college.

The drive for a better life also was evident in the remarks made by several participants. Participants discussed experiences in their life that had a profound impact on them. These experiences led them to have a desire to change their circumstances. These circumstances included growing up in a drug-infested environment or poverty-stricken lifestyle, and they created the motivation to excel in spite of life circumstances. Beta discussed his parents' financial status and the fact that his parents' limited education propelled him to want to succeed in life. Delta described his introduction to the drug life and the life-changing circumstances that shaped his destination. Alpha recalled the struggles of his mother to get her college degree. It was perseverance as a young mother, working, and making financial debt to complete her goal to better her family's life that inspired him to this day to do his best.

Subtheme 1a: Balance and Support. According to Wood and Williams (2013), academic factors include positive academic behaviors that lead to increased success. This research question further supports Wood's and Williams' research about positive academic behavior leading to an increase in success.

For the participants in this study, these positive academic behaviors included course load, adequate counseling, time management, and study groups. The participants understood the importance of their academic studying and obtaining a passing grade in

order to graduate. The success of the participants in this study was their graduation from community colleges.

Subtheme 1b: Walking in and Beyond Parents' Footsteps. Bean and Metzner (1975) referred to variables and factors that occur prior to students' enrollment in college and are expected to affect their academic outcome. Mason (1998) outlined the degree of certainty as a background variable that affected a student's persistence at community college.

Background factors identified in this study were participants' home environments and, in particular, their parents' educational levels. All participants indicated they wanted to achieve more academically than their parents in order to either follow the dreams their parents could not follow or to demonstrate their respect for their parents' struggles in parenting them successfully in challenging environments.

Subtheme 1c: Improving Finances, Dispelling Stereotypes. Bean and Metzner (1985) and Freeman and Huggan (2009) discussed environmental factors as life circumstances external to the institution that affect students' success within it. Similarly, Wood and Williams (2013) noted that environmental factors are variables that pull students' attention and intensity away from their college endeavors. The environmental factors centered from Mason's (1998) study discussed a poverty-stricken neighborhood and high crime rate. The study demonstrated that African American males that had oriented goals had an increase in persistence. Another finding was Wood, Hilton, and Lewis (2011), which stated that employed students perceived career-related jobs as a positive towards persistence.

In the current study, an exploration of environmental factors revealed participants were motivated by financial reasons and the desire to dispel stereotypes. Some of the participants juggled work and school, while others – mostly those whose families were described as being middle income – focused solely on school. Nevertheless, all discussed the financial challenges and explained their desire to alleviate financial challenges as a factor they considered in their persistence. Participants also explained that they did not want to be perceived as representative of the negative stereotypes of African American men. Each of these factors motivated them to persist in the community college programs.

Conclusion

The findings of this qualitative research study reflected the research participants' responses to the interview questions. There were no notable contradictions between my findings and previous literature. It should be noted that there were varying socioeconomic levels among the participants. They were internally motivated to excel towards their respective degrees but impacted by various factors in their persistence to obtain an associate's degree.

As the research study examined the persistence of African American males, there was reinforcement of the models of Tinto (1993) and Bandura (1977). Participants of the study completed their associate's degree before pursuing their advanced degree at the research university. The determinations of these individuals were self-evident in the tape-recorded interviews, as well as in their responses given to the interview questions. Various factors influenced the persistence of the participants. Tinto (1975,1987) discussed the academic and social integration of a participant to their intended school. On

the other hand, Bandura (1997) talked about one's perception of thinking that he is capable of conquering the task.

The emerging theme of motivation from external factors emphasized the research of Strayhorn (2012), Wood and Williams (2013), and Woods (2012b). The persistence of students increased when they were intertwined within the university (Tinto, 1993).

Participants noted their experiences working with study groups. While this reflects an academic factor, it also reflects participants' connection to the community college as they sought out student groups to make connections and support them.

With the high departure rates of African American males at community colleges, the primary focus of this study was to examine persistence factors that influence their completion of community colleges. The investigation sought to understand determining factors that propel this minority group to complete their associate's degree when some of their fellow African American males depart their respective community colleges early in postsecondary education. The findings of this study confirm previous research examining the retention of students taken from the theoretical framework. The inquiry revealed that African American males have a high departure rate from community colleges when they are not connected to their institution (Mason, 1998; Wood & Williams, 2013). They were determined to complete the task of obtaining their associate's degree, and the themes which emerged from this study outlined the participants' driving force of motivation.

The findings from the study support previous research that suggests there are factors that influence African American male students in their persistence at community colleges (Mason, 1998; Strayhorn, 2012; Urias & Wood, 2014; Wood, 2012a). The findings outline the factors of family expectations and a better life as emerging themes. In

focusing on the African American male students persisting in community college, this study examined the factors that motivated this select group to continue their studies. It provides insight into other factors influencing the persistence of African American male students at community colleges.

Implications for Practice

The following are suggested implications for practice based on the findings from the current study.

The first suggested implication is for community colleges to implement programs in which the whole family is incorporated in the persistence process to ensure the academic success of African American male students at community colleges. The finding that African American male students determine that their families are important factors in their persistence affirms Mason's (1998) suggestion that better life, motivation from external forces, and family's expectation play a part in the success of a person's career path. It differed from Mason's study in one way because the participants came from a two-parent environment.

The second suggested implication is for community colleges to implement more structured study and mentoring groups for African American males. Administrators could monitor the progress of these groups and use the groups to help identify students' challenges, whether those challenges are academic, social, or financial concerns. It was discussed using Tinto's (1993) model that the students' integration into their institution of study allows for them to persist in their studies. Bandura (1997) discussed the importance of aligning these males with positive, inspiring role models. This allows the participants

to observe and model their mentors as a preventive tool to increase retention of this minority group of students at the community college level.

The third implication is for community colleges to implement preventative programs focused on persistence. The findings of this study could be shared with community colleges to enable them to understand the persistence factors that influence African American males at community colleges. Providing the findings could help the administration gain better knowledge and insight into the early departure of this minority group. By identifying the antecedent of the early departures of African American male community college students, practitioners and policymakers could implement preventive plans to decrease dropout of this minority group.

Recommendations for Future Research

While there are several findings from this study, there are several recommendations that could be made in future research.

It is recommended that a larger qualitative study take place at other institutions to see if the findings from this study offer more insights into the persistence of African American males at community colleges.

It is recommended that qualitative data collection be more robust, perhaps with the use of focus groups, individual interviews, documents, and artifacts.

It is recommended that future research examine more fully the various factors related to persistence. For example, researchers suggest the examination of persistence factors should include background/defining, social, academic, environmental, institutional, and psychological (Mason, 1998; Wood & William, 2013). In this study, I did not focus intently on the social, institutional, or psychological factors.

It is recommended that future research focus solely on institutional factors related to persistence. A particular focus on institutional factors would be ideal as the participants in this study did not indicate institutional factors were important. However, Wood and Williams (2013) stated institutional factors are the institution's role in facilitating student outcome. Identified variables include respondents' level of participation in intramural/non-varsity sports, intercollegiate sports, and other extracurricular activities.

It is recommended that future research examine the family's role in persistence. The three emerging themes for this study were secured heavily in the connection of the family.

It is recommended that future research examine the persistence factors of African American males receiving a general education diploma and completing bachelor's degrees.

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APPENDIX A

COMMUNITY COLLEGE SELECTION DEMOGRAPHICS

SECTION 1: PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. What grade are you in this year at the university?

2. How old are you right now?

3. How did you finish your secondary education?

4. What was your father's highest education level?

5. What was your mother's highest education level?

6. How would you describe your family's economic level?

7. What is your program of study?

8. What area of study was your associate degree?

9. How long did it take to complete your associate degree?

APPENDIX B
OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Main Interview Questions

1. What were the factors that inspired you to persist in completing community college and motivate you to continue your academic studies?
2. What allowed you to persist in your studies?

Guiding Interview Questions

Academic Factors

3. How does the number of semester hours taken relate to your persistence at your university?
4. Describe how you used your time to prepare for your classes.
5. How did you feel about academic counseling during your first year of school?
6. How did you use the academic counseling or study groups to prepare for your classes?
7. Give a brief description of your emotion or feeling about getting help from the faculty or tutor.

Background Factors

8. When thinking about your age, how did it relate to your desire to persist towards completing community college?
9. How did your parents' educational level influence you in your persistence in completing community college and transferring to continue your education?

Environmental Factors

10. How did having a job influence your feelings of financial security?
11. Did life stressors influence your academic success of completing community college?
12. How did the negative stereotyping affect your focus of persistence?

APPENDIX C
APPROVAL LETTER

Protocol ID: IRB-16-687

Principal Investigator: Linda Coats

Protocol Title: Factors Influencing Black Male Persistence in Community College

Review Type: EXEMPT

Approval Date: August 21, 2017

Expiration Date: April 21, 2018

The above referenced study has been approved. To access your approval documents, log into myProtocol and click on the protocol number to open the approved study. Your official approval letter can be found under the Event History section. For non-exempt approved studies, all stamped documents (e.g., consent, recruitment) can be found in the Attachment section and are labeled accordingly.

If you have any questions that the HRPP can assist you in answering, please do not hesitate to contact us at irb@research.msstate.edu or [662.325.3994](tel:662.325.3994).

APPENDIX D
RECRUITMENT FLYER

African American males' identification of
factors that contributed
to their community college persistence

You are invited to participate in a study evaluating the factors influencing Black male persistence in community college. Specific factors to be examined are academic, background/defining, environmental, social, and institutional. This study will be conducted by Ulissa Coburn at Mississippi State University, Department of Community College Leadership.

The study involves one-hour visit completing a recorded face to face interview. If you are an African American male community college graduate and would like more information about participating, contact: Ulissa Coburn at 601-575-1191 or ubc1@msstate.edu

Title of Research Study:

Researcher(s): Ulissa Coburn, Mississippi State University

Procedures: I would like to ask you to participate in a research study. If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in an audio recorded face-to face interview session. The session should take about an hour to complete.

Questions: If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Ulissa Coburn at 601-575-1191.

Voluntary Participation: Please understand that your **participation is voluntary**. Your **refusal to participate will involve no penalty**. You **may discontinue your participation** at any time without penalty.

Use this section if signed consent will be obtained and delete the box below.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Participant Signature

Investigator Signature

Date