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**EXAMINING THE COMPLEXITY OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR
BLACK MALES IN AN EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FUND PROGRAM
AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

by

LaVon A. Williams

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of
Doctor of Education

at

Rowan University

March 20, 2017

Dissertation Chair: James Coaxum III, Ph.D

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Dedications

To my family, thank you for believing in me and supporting what felt like an everlasting endeavor. This accomplishment is just as much yours as it is mine.

To Tahj, Lauryn, and Carter, you three are my inspiration and motivation to never stop learning. Everything I have done and will do is to exemplify that all things are possible when you apply yourself to completing your dreams.

To my wife, Sonate, without your support I would not have been able to become the educated, loving husband and father you desired. Thank you for being my one and only.

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Abstract

LaVon A. Williams

EXAMINING THE COMPLEXITY OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR BLACK MALES AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN AN EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FUND PROGRAM

2016-2017

James Coaxum III, Ph.D

Doctor of Education

The purpose of this research is to describe the lived experience of Black males in an Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program at a community college. According to research, community colleges are the first option for many Black male students who are underprepared academically and come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. This phenomenological study examines the lived experience of Black males in an EOF program because of its ability to provide access, equality, and resources to students. Ten face-to-face interviews were conducted in order to describe the essence of this phenomenon. The findings from this study revealed that there are five themes and three subthemes Black males experience as EOF students at a community college. These five themes are EOF provides a supportive atmosphere, family and peer influence, community college is a stepping stone, being a Black male and a community college student, and fighting to stay focused. In addition, this study provides narrative about Black men seeking to attain an education as a means to achieve upward mobility and to lift their self-confidence. Lastly, this study provides insight to aid policymakers, higher education practitioners, and others connected to Black males to better understand how unique their experience is pursuing an associate degree from a community college.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In 2010, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) published the *Status and Trends in Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups* report. This report indicated that there has been an increase in the number of Black students 18 to 24 years old who enrolled in colleges or universities. The report also illustrates that since 1980 there has been a 12% increase in the number of African Americans seeking to attain an undergraduate degree. Although over the past three decades African Americans have increased enrollment in higher education, the NCES report highlights that the majority of African American students are enrolling in 2-year public institutions. The report points out that 36% of Black students attend 2-year public colleges. In addition, 3% of African Americans attend private 2-year for-profit institutions. However, since 1978, more women than men, in general, have earned associate degrees (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). According to Dabney-Smith (2009) African American male community college students have drastically lower graduation and degree completion rates than other students. In fact, research declares African American men lag behind African American women and other ethnic groups that attend both 2-year and 4-year colleges (Walpole, 2008; Cuyjet, 2006; Dabney-Smith, 2009; Jackson, 2011; Jez, 2014). For this reason, an investigation of the plight of African American men at community colleges is necessary.

According to McElroy and Andrews (2002), an investigation is necessary because while Black men have low postsecondary attainment, they account for 11% of the poor in our society. McElroy and Andrews assert that educational attainment is a key factor that

influences the likelihood that Black males will not fall victim to poverty (p. 131). These scholars also declare that “the higher the educational attainment level, the lower the poverty rate” (p. 131). Researchers such as Harper (2006); Bonner and Bailey (2006); Messer (2006); Catching (2006); Jones and Hotep (2006) have studied issues and ideas about how to enhance the educational attainment of African American males by focusing on academic climate, college athletics, masculinity, and successful support programs. These scholars have added to the breadth and depth of research on Black males enrolled in postsecondary institutions. However, within this research literature, there is a lack of studies focused on Black men enrolled in community colleges. For example, in the book by Michael J. Cuyjet and Associates, *African American Men in College*, out of 21 chapters only one chapter pertains to research that was conducted at a community college.

In fact, the research about the educational attainment of Black men at the community college level is so limited that Wood’s (2010) meta-synthesis study reports that over the last 40 years a total of 50 publications have focused on African American males at community colleges. Out of the 50 publications, thirty-eight (38) were dissertations, eight (8) were journal articles, and four (4) were book chapters. Although there is a limited amount of literature about the experiences of Black men seeking educational attainment at a community college, this dissertation is distinct because it analyzes the experiences of Black men at a community college participating in an Educational Opportunity Fund program.

Statement of the Problem

In 2006, Gabbidon and Peterson reported that there are forms of racism that cause many Black men to experience stress, which damages their aspirations for succeeding academically. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) refers to one such form of racism as the “school-to-prison pipeline.” According to the ACLU, the school-to-prison pipeline affects minorities because America has policies and practices that reflect the prioritization of incarceration over education. For example, Mosby (2009) points out that the American educational system assigns paths to students depending on their class within society and African Americans are often located within the lower status of society, which causes them to struggle to achieve academically and economically. Cose (2002) asserts Black students attend public schools in poor urban communities that are often factories for failure. He insists Black children are not treated like human beings fully capable of great success; they are frequently treated like dullards simply making time until they are ready to collect welfare or go to prison (p. 91). Harper (2009) asserts Black men have been “niggered” inside and outside of the classroom by being told that they are unlikely to accomplish much in life and that being successful is an anomaly for them (p. 698). According to Dubois (1903), experiences comparable to these create a double consciousness in the minds of Black men, which makes them reluctant to take advantage of the chance to attain a college degree. He defines double consciousness as “always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (p. 5). Double consciousness occurs when Black men are warring with two ideals in one body while trying not to lose the opportunity of self-development (Dubois, 1897; Mosby, 2009). Research conducted at four-year colleges suggests double consciousness affects the lived experience and

persistence of African American men (Hickman, 2008; Ervin, 2008). However, there seems to be a lack of research that examines whether Black male students experience double consciousness at two-year colleges.

In light of this, Cuyjet (2006) suggests that social conditions, elementary education, high school education, employment, the criminal justice system, and interracial social interactions Black men experience in college prevent them from succeeding academically. Hampton (2002) advocates that every time Black men do not succeed academically, “the country is robbed of talents that could enrich the lives of many” (p. 4). He asserts Black male students’ failure is attributable to a combination of complex behaviors and conditions, while Kunjufu (1986) advocates it is practices from instructors and the structure of the educational system that create resistance in Black men to achieve academic success. According to Reynolds (2010), the Black male experience through the educational system is so problematic Black males should “hold educators accountable for educational malpractice against them” (p. 159). Although scholars have emphasized some of the impetus for low persistence among Black males in college, the larger problem is that too many Black men are disproportionately underachieving in all segments of the academic sector (Bush & Bush, 2010).

According to research, Black males are underachieving because they consistently receive a less than adequate education and less support than others (Geburu, 2009; Kunjufu, 1986, 1989; Richards, 2007; Wood, 2010; 2012). For example, the Schott Foundation (2010) reports Black males “are not given the same opportunities to participate in classes offering enriched educational offerings” (p. 4). The foundation declares “on average, more than twice as many White male students are given the extra

resources of gifted and talented programs by their schools as Black male students” (p. 4). As a result, research suggests African American males begin college with weaker academic backgrounds than their counterparts (Cuyjet, 2006; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Dabney-Smith, 2009; Glenn, 2007; Hagedorn, Maxwell, Hampton, 2007; Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, & Mugenda, 2007; Morley, 2007; Richards, 2007; Walpole, 2008; Wood, 2010; 2011; 2012). In fact, scholars point out that the differences in high school curriculum account for a significant amount of variation in the academic preparation of African Americans (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Morley, 2007; Richards, 2007). In addition, Muhammad (2008) points out that high school counselors misguide students or do not offer enough support assisting students in making the transition from high school to college.

Once Black men are enrolled in college, research suggests many Black males begin to feel isolated because they are ashamed of their socioeconomics, their families, and how they are portrayed and perceived (Allen, 1985; Ball, 2010; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Jackson, 2005; King 1998). According to Bonner and Bailey (2006), identity development and self-esteem for students of color make them susceptible to academic disidentification, which creates additional anxiety to combat negative stereotypes about their academic ability. According to Steele (1992), “when the concept of stereotype threat affects school life, disidentification is a high price to pay for psychic comfort” (p. 4). He defines stereotype threat as “the situational threat of being negatively stereotyped” (p. 6). It “affects the members of any group about whom there exists some generally known negative stereotype” (Steele, 1997, p. 617). Toure (2011) points out stereotype threat occurs when a person participates in something that their identity group is negatively

stereotyped for and they are fearful of confirming that stereotype or work hard to refute it. With this in mind, if the threat becomes pervasive it can trigger academic disidentification (Bonner & Bailey, 2006). For instance, Bonner and Bailey (2006) and Steele (1997) suggest students who have high self-esteem and are performing well academically are more susceptible to stereotype threat. Steele (1997) emphasizes this identification process can cause constant frustration in Black men because they continuously self-evaluate.

bell hooks (2004) suggests Black men are not successful academically because “sadly, the real truth, which is taboo to speak, is that this is a culture that does not love Black males” (p. xi). She declares “every day Black males face a culture that tells them that they can never really achieve enough money or power to set them free from racist White tyranny in the work world” (p. 26). hooks believes that White-supremacist capitalist patriarchal culture causes “most boys from poor and underprivileged classes to be groomed to remain permanent members of an underclass” (p. 34). In addition, she suggests Black men are not prepared to succeed in life because of the change in their “cool pose.” According to hooks, “there was once a time when Black male cool was defined by the way in which Black men confronted the hardships of life without allowing their spirits to be ravaged” (p. 147). She now declares Black men have adopted a false pose of cool that has a “poor me” victim mentality.

According to Downing (2011), having a victim mentality “keeps people from seeing and acting on choices that could help them achieve the life they want” (p. 42). He asserts that this kind of “stinking thinkin” can afflict cultural groups. Although Downing suggests possessing a negative mindset can affect productivity, research from the College

Board presents something different. For instance, one participant of the College Board's four days of dialogue on the educational challenges of minority males suggests "young Black males are in a crisis in this country. Instead of addressing the problem, society has created entire prison industries out of our misery" (College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, 2010, p. 9). According to Wood (2010), "Black men are depicted as low-achieving, jobless, and nefarious criminals" instead of intellectuals (p. 50). Scholars point out that if African American men are portrayed positively, they are often presented as athletes (Horton, 2011; Kunjufu, 1986; 1989; Richards, 2007; Wood, 2010). As a result, Black male community college students "indicate their perception (e.g., faculty, peers) that others view them as academically inferior" (Wood, 2012, p. 31). Historically, Black students were considered inferior to White students in all aspects of life (Richards, 2007). For instance, Black students were educated in segregated facilities and received an inferior education because of inadequate facilities and educational resources such as books and materials (Bass, 2011; Catching, 2006; 2008; Richards, 2007). Not only did African Americans receive an inferior education, research points out major national leaders endorsed ideas about the inferiority of African Americans (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Pursuing this further, scholars have found that many Black men attempt to use the higher education system as a mechanism for empowerment and a tool for success, but do not succeed (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Evans, 1993; Gabbidon & Peterson, 2006; Harper, 2009). For example, the National Center of Education Statistics (2010) reports that since 1980 there has been a 20% increase in the enrollment of African Americans 18 to 24-years old, yet the report also indicates that the

largest difference between male and female enrollment pertains to Black students (p. 117). As a matter of fact, Black female students account for 64% of Black undergraduate enrollment (p. 117). Although more females are enrolling in college than males, research declares “it is indisputable that without access to mainstream education African Americans are unable even to maintain the status quo” (Evans, 1993, p. 507).

According to the Center of Law and Social Policy (2010), when Black men do attain a degree, they are not as financially successful as White men. The Center of Law and Social Policy reported Black men with bachelor’s degrees do not have equivalent financial success comparable to White men. They indicated Black men with bachelor’s degrees have earnings comparable to White men with associate’s degrees, and Black men with associate’s degrees earn about the same amount of money as White men with only a high school diploma who have never taken a college course. The Center of Law and Social Policy’s research confirms that when Black men are educated, they are still not as successful as White men because their education does not “accumulate any measure of wealth to pass on to future generations” (p. 18). As a result, their research challenges the belief that the attainment of a college degree is a tool for success.

In 2010, the Schott Foundation reported that New Jersey had the highest number of Black men who achieve academic success in high school. *Yes We Can: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males* (2010) suggests Black men in New Jersey have a 69% high school graduation rate. Despite the fact Black men in New Jersey graduate from high school at higher rates than Black men from other states, Black men in New Jersey still graduate below the overall national graduation average rate of 75%. And

although New Jersey has the highest graduation rate of Black men from high school, the state does not produce overwhelming Black male community college graduation rates.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), the number of Black men in New Jersey from 2010 to 2013 who graduated with an associate's degree was 2,148. During that same period, research revealed Black men at community colleges had an overall graduation rate of 19% (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015). Because the graduation rate of Black men at a community college is below the national average of 29%, research confirms that there is a need to improve the number of Black men attaining associate's degrees from community colleges.

Educational Opportunity Fund Program

In an attempt to address academic challenges amongst college students, in 1965, the University of California at Berkeley initiated the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) by enrolling 100 at-risk students (Allen, 1976). The students enrolled in this program were predominately African Americans and other minorities such as Chicanos and American Indians (Allen, 1976). These students flourished so much that in 1968, EOP programs were expanded in California state colleges, and the 1969 Alquist's California Senate Bill 164 established EOP programs in two-year community colleges (Allen, 1976). In 1967, California inspired the New Jersey Chancellor of Higher Education, Ralph Dungan, to direct college presidents to propose a program that would assist students from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds (NJ Commission of Higher Education, 2010). A few months after Ralph Dungan's proposal, the New Jersey Commission of Higher Education created the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF), which sponsors more than one-third of the African American students at

private institutions and over one-quarter of African American students at public institutions in the state (New Jersey Commission of Higher Education, 2010).

Research from the New Jersey Commission of Higher Education suggests that the support an EOF program provides is effective. For example, the New Jersey Commission of Higher Education reported that in 2012, the total percentage of EOF students making satisfactory academic progress was 91%. As a matter of fact, the same report points out that in 2008, New Jersey's four-year cohort of EOF students at county colleges (which are community colleges) had a 23% graduation rate (New Jersey Commission of Higher Education, 2015). However, this report does not provide the transfer rate of students who attended another college before they graduate. Although the 2015 report does not include the transfer rate of EOF county college students, in 2012, the New Jersey Commission of Higher Education reported that EOF's four-year cohort of county college students had a 13% transfer rate. The 2012 report combined the cohort's 13% transfer rate and their 14% graduation rate to find that EOF programs enhance the academic success of community college students to 27% which is close to the 30% national graduation rate for two-year colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

Although the graduation rate and transfer rate of EOF students in New Jersey is close to the national average, the program does not support as many male participants as it does females. In 2015, the New Jersey Commission of Higher Education reported that 64% of students enrolled in an EOF program were women, while 36% were men. The New Jersey Commission of Higher Education also reported that 32% of the total students who participated in EOF programs attended community colleges, and that 36% of all EOF students in New Jersey were African American. According to scholars, support

programs such as EOF are a good option to help Black men attain college degrees (Brown-Ingles, 2003; Pope, 2006; Richards, 2007). However, one dilemma with New Jersey's EOF programs is that there are not enough Black male participants.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of Black men at a community college in an Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program in the state of New Jersey. According to scholars, community colleges provide an open door of opportunity for students to succeed (Bush, 2004; Dabney-Smith, 2009; Gebru, 2009; Smith, 2010). In fact, for Black men, community colleges serve as the most effective route to degree attainment (Bass, 2011; Gebru, 2009). However, at this stage in the research, the lived experience of Black men seeking degree attainment at a community college is generally described as challenging (Adams-Mahaley, 2012; Mosby, 2009). Given the intricacies of being a Black male student at a community college and a participant in a support program, examining the experiences of Black men at a community college will identify the challenges they must overcome to persist and attain an associate's degree. Although research suggests Black men are provided the opportunity to achieve academic success at community colleges, there are few studies that investigate their lived experience (Bass, 2011; Pope, 2006; Wellsbrock, 1997; Wood, 2010). This study is distinct because it examined the lived experience of Black men at a community college in a support program by highlighting the impact of double consciousness and an EOF program.

Research Questions

In order to identify the lived experience of Black men at a community college in an EOF program, three research questions have been identified. The three guiding questions are:

1. What are the lived experiences of Black men in an EOF program at a community college?
2. How do issues of race (double consciousness) impact the experiences of Black men at a community college in an EOF program?
3. What role does an EOF program play in the persistence of Black men enrolled in a community college?

Significance of the Study

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2014), at least 48% of students who attend a community college are Black. Community colleges are the first option for many of these students because so many students are underprepared academically and come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, which results in students having to choose a community college or nothing (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Because Black men seek higher education to progress in society, increase literacy, and understand ethical issues, it is vital to examine the experiences of African American men at a community college in a support program to find what is beneficial to their academic success. In addition, this study is significant because it can be used as a tool to: (a) inform educational leaders about the perceptions Black men have about a community college and an EOF program; (b) identify the rationale of Black men seeking to obtain an education

as a means to achieve upward mobility and uplift their self-confidence. Lastly, this study can provide insight that can aid policymakers, higher education practitioners, and Black families to better understand how unique the experience is for Black men trying to attain an associate degree from a community college.

Herndon and Hirt (2004) advocate that education has been a vehicle for many Black men and Black families to overcome society's perception and treatment of them to succeed. Nevertheless, the impact of a government support program at community colleges has rarely been investigated to address what assists Black male persistence. Investigating Black male students at a community college in a support program is critical because research has pointed out that retention strategies such as eliminating racism, promoting diversity, enhancing counseling, and providing effective orientations programming can help increase Black male students' graduation rates (Pope, 2006). Moreover, investigating the experience of Black men at a community college in a support program such as EOF is beneficial because the program often encompasses all of the previously mentioned strategies for retention.

Summary

In 2008, Cohen and Brawer reported the overall percentage of students who earn an associate's degree was 20% (p. 31). They declared that this low percentage is connected to low graduation rates of minority students. Cohen and Brawer suggest minority students who begin at community colleges have lower academic achievement than students with the same ability at senior institutions (p. 56). As a result of these claims, there is even greater need to study the experience minorities have at community colleges to find areas that may help improve the degree attainment. Since African

American men have the lowest graduation rate, this study seeks to understand what Black men experience as community college students. This study specifically will focus on the experiences of Black men who participate in an EOF program because EOF programs are designed to improve the educational opportunities of the less fortunate.

According to research, Black men seeking education in America learn that they are an American problem (Dubois, 1903; Evans, 1993; Madhubuti, 1991; Post, 1995). They learn that they are “inferior, ineducable, and a victim” (Madhubuti, 1991, p. ii). Madhubuti asserts a Black man’s educational training causes him to view the world from a victim’s viewpoint. For example, in America there are limited numbers of decent, well-paid jobs, and most of the working class and nonwhite young people are not destined to get them. The current unemployment rate for all African Americans is 11.3 % (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Although this may be true, for African American men (age 20 and older) the unemployment rate was also 11.3% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). These high unemployment rates cause many Black men to question the purpose for enrolling and focusing in school (particularly in higher education) when they know there is a strong possibility they will become unemployed after graduation. However, statistics from the United States Bureau of Labor (2014) also shows Black men really need an education to be successful. The bureau reported African American men 25 and older who have some college or an associate’s degree have a lower unemployment rate than African American men who did not complete high school or who never attended college (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013; 2014). In spite of this finding, there is a disparity in the percentage of Black men in college compared to the percentage in the prison system. For instance, The Council of the Great City Schools (2010) reported Black

men ages eighteen and over account for 5% of the college population and 36% of the prison population. This study will link gender, ethnicity, and a support program to the experiences of Black men at a community college to examine what impacts their persistence for attaining an associate's degree.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

In 2014, the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) reported that only 19% of Black men who enrolled at a community college in 2010 graduated within 3 years. Due to the low percentage of Black men graduating from community college, this literature review identifies challenges Black males in higher education experience by analyzing research through a Critical Theory perspective. According to Creswell (2007), a critical theory is “concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender” (p. 27). By analyzing this study through a critical theory context, I will identify the lived experiences of Black male community college students by interpreting their meaning of social life and the historical problem of double consciousness.

This section of the research also provides a historical overview of community colleges and the value of Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) programs in the state of New Jersey. For the purpose of this study the following definitions of community college, EOF, and Black men (African American) will be used. Community college has been defined as “any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree” (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 5). The Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program has been defined as a program that provides New Jersey residents from economically and educationally disadvantage backgrounds access to higher education (New Jersey Commission of Higher Education, 2010). Students under this program are capable and motivated but lack adequate preparation for college study. Black men or African American men are defined as men from the African diaspora. The

term “Black men” is used in the broadest and most inclusive sense to describe men of African descent, whether they hail from Africa, the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, or Latin America. In addition, this study will also refer to Black men as those who completed their college or Educational Opportunity Fund application and self-identified racially or ethnically as Black/non-Hispanic or African-American (Jordan, 2008; Richards, 2007).

The Mission of Community Colleges

The mission of community colleges has been traced back to the late 19th century when William Rainey Harper, founding president of the University of Chicago envisioned separating the first two years of college from the second two years of college. What Harper envisioned was once referred to as Junior Colleges and, since then, community colleges have become a reliable source for educational attainment in the United States. According to Vaughan (1982), community colleges were created for students and subjects previously excluded from higher education, giving credence to the concept of the “people’s college” (p. 15). Vaughan posits that community colleges were developed from the belief that all Americans should have access to higher education and not just the privileged (p. 20). During the 1960s and 1970s the revolution of community colleges began due to the road paved by the Truman Commission, the GI Bill, and the availability of student-based financial aid (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011; Vaughan, 1982; Warren, 1985). The effects of these movements provided the belief that education beyond high school was not for privileged or academically strong students but a given right for all students (Vaughan, 1982).

According to Martorana (1983), there are few institutions of higher learning in America that can match the attributes of community colleges (p. 109). For example, research suggests the mission of community colleges puts emphasis on teaching, accessibility, low cost, comprehensive offerings, and enabling students to transfer to four-year institutions (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Vaughan, 1982; Warren, 1985; Ratcliff, 1987). According to research, the mission of community colleges is to provide access to higher education for all people and especially for less traditional populations of students (Smith, 2010; Gebru, 2009; Jordan, 2008). In fact, the American Association of Community Colleges [AACC](2014) reports that 36% of the students who attend community colleges are first-generation college students. Research also suggests that a primary reason so many students attend community colleges is the institutional intention to uplift students to acceptable levels of proficiency in reading, writing, mathematics, and study skills (Pincus, 1986; Warren 1985). Cohen and Brawer (2008) declare community colleges meet the practical realities of older, place-bound, part-time students with jobs, families, and other obligations while they are enrolled in school. Currently, there are 1,132 community colleges serving over 13 million students providing general and vocational education to students who desire to become intellectually adept and highly skilled (AACC, 2014; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Kane & Rouse, 1999). As a result, community colleges service over 45% of undergraduates in the United States, and 48% of the African American undergraduates in the United States (AACC, 2014). In light of community colleges becoming increasingly diverse, they also provide innovative support programs to

help enable students' success (Vaughan, 1982; Warren, 1985; Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Shugart & Romano, 2011).

Community College Support Programs

According to research, community colleges provide numerous support programs to assist students seeking upward mobility and academic success (Bass, 2011; Dabney-Smith, 2009; Gebru, 2009). Gebru (2009) reports that a comprehensive user-friendly program includes assessment and placement, counseling/academic advising, learning communities, supplemental instruction and tutoring. Community colleges provide support programs such as remedial studies to present students with the foundation to succeed in college-level work (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Gebru, 2009). They offer English programs to students who speak English as a second language. They provide learning communities for students to build bonds and become more engaged in the academic life of their institutions. Another interesting program community colleges provide is freshman experience programs. These programs provide academic counseling for first-semester students with at least three remedial courses (as cited in Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 295).

Black Male Initiative (BMI) Programs. Although community colleges provide support programs for all students, in recent years, community colleges have created African American Male Initiative Programs or Black Male Initiatives (BMI) to increase the retention and graduation rate of Black male students. College presidents who implement these programs are providing a counterattack on the plight of Black men seeking to attain a college degree. These programs can be found across the country at community colleges such as Houston Community College, Maricopa Community College, and Westchester Community College. In addition to offering support to increase

retention and graduation rates, some of these programs provide unique services. For example, St. Louis Community College's BMI program provides specialized orientation activities, peer and community mentoring, tutoring services, special workshops and seminars, stipends, peer mentors and early alert academic monitoring to Black men (St. Louis Community College, 2011). Because this program offers stipends, it is unique from other BMI programs.

In the same way St. Louis Community College's BMI program is unique, the San Jacinto College's Men of Honor program is unique because it provides assigned mentors to students who attend weekly meetings and monthly forums. The program trains students to become mentors and peer coaches. Students in the program must also participate in regional and national African-American male initiative conferences, and engage in community service that includes providing food to a local women's shelter and campus service projects (Peng-Armao, 2010).

On a larger scale, in 2004, the Board of Trustees of The City University of New York (CUNY) approved its Master Plan, which for the first time in the University's history had a BMI included in it (The City University of New York [CUNY], 2011). This historic initiative is being conducted on 18 campuses and 3 are community colleges. The community college campuses are the Borough of Manhattan Community College, Bronx Community College, and Queensborough Community College. Although these support programs are needed, in 2008 they were challenged and investigated by the Federal Department of Education for any anti-discrimination law violations (Goldstein, 2008). Unfortunately, in our society there are people who believe Black men should not be singled out for needing additional academic assistance. This form of thinking questions

whether it is unethical to assist students who have constantly been academically challenged by society at large. The mission of higher education is supposed to be for the betterment of students academically and professionally (Vaughan, 1982; Warren, 1985; Allen, 1985; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). Therefore, those who challenge efforts that ensure students are provided additional services do not understand the mission and purpose of higher education. Moreover, research has found Black men have a higher success rate for attaining a college degree when the institution is engaged in uplifting its students (Allen, 1976; Allen, 1985; Dabney-Smith, 2009; Duhart & Fourniller, 2010; Harper, 2009; Kane & Rouse, 1999; McGrath & Tobia, 2011; McKinley & Brayboy, 2003; Strayhorn, 2008).

New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund Program. In the state of New Jersey, support programs such as the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program provide services to students of all ethnic backgrounds in order to support and encourage degree attainment. In 2015, the New Jersey Commission of Higher Education reports that 36% percent of the students who are enrolled in an EOF program are of African American descent. In order for students to qualify for the EOF program at both four-year and two-year colleges, these students must be identified as underprepared academically and financially needy. The New Jersey Commission of Higher Education declares that students eligible for this program should “exhibit evidence of academic and/or creative promise” and “have limited educational and financial resources for college because of poor high school preparation and have economic backgrounds that reflect a history of poverty.” Students are also eligible if their family demonstrates a history of poverty which generally includes documented, long-term economic hardships such as: a) no

accumulation of assets and the inability to provide more than the basic needs of family members; b) live in an area historically populated by low-income families commonly called a “pocket of poverty”; c) have a sibling who was or is enrolled in an EOF program; d) are a first-generation college student who is, or whose family is eligible for government assistance; e) have successfully completed a NJ GEAR UP state project or NJ College Bound grant. In addition, students are also financially eligible if their family’s income falls within the criteria shown on Table 1:

Table 1

Educational Opportunity Fund Financial Eligibility

Academic Year 2014-2015	
Applicants with a Household Size of	Gross Income Not to Exceed
1	\$22,980
2	\$31,020
3	\$39,060
4	\$47,100
5	\$55,140
6	\$63,180
7	\$71,220
8	\$79,260
**	For each additional member of the household add \$8,040

Source: State of New Jersey Commission of Higher Education, 2014.

According to the New Jersey Commission of Higher Education (2010), African American students have a dominant presence in New Jersey EOF programs. Because of African American students’ overwhelming presence in EOF programs, it is easy to see

that a good portion of African American students and their families do not have the wherewithal to support their children academically and financially through college. Jordan (2008) declares the primary reason some Black men are enrolled in EOF programs at community colleges is because they have not received adequate education throughout their K-12 experiences (p. 28). Hickman (2008) believes the reason many Black men are not succeeding academically is because of educational racism. For example, research suggests when Black men attend college they are often stereotyped as student-athletes instead of scholars on campus (Richard, 2007; Dougherty, 2008; Kunjufu, 1989). In addition, Hickman (2008) asserts that if a student is not raised in an academic environment that honors education, then education will not be essential to the student.

On the other hand, the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* ([JBHE], 2011) reports that regardless of a Black student's upbringing, he or she can achieve academic success. For example, the JBHE reports Black students are overcoming academic difficulties and earning doctoral degrees although their families did not go to college. However, what is not illustrated in the JBHE study is the support Black students are given to attain a college degree. Because support programs such as EOF provide assistance to a significant number of Black students, this study focuses on African American males and examines how double consciousness affects their persistence, how support programs benefit Black men, and what experiences can make an impact on Black men seeking to attain a degree in a community college setting.

The Condition of Black Men in Higher Education

In 1991, Madhubuti declared Black men in the United States were virtually powerless, land-less, and moneyless compared to White men (p. 61). He posited that

Black men in America do not make any earth-changing decisions about anything that concerns their condition or the future of Black people (p. 82). For instance, although President Obama is the first African American President of the United States of America, the United States Congress (which passes many legislative laws) only has two African Americans senators. At the same time, in the higher education sector, research suggests African American college presidents are most likely to head predominantly African American colleges and universities or minority community colleges within nine states (Bugg, 2010). Bugg found African American males account for 3% of all the community college presidents in the United States. In fact, he reports 74% of African American presidents are found in the following states Alabama, California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, and Texas.

According to Bugg (2010), African American males face two significant barriers in their career advancement to a community college presidency: access discrimination, and treatment discrimination. However, if African American men do not attain a proper education, their chances of being applicants are more than likely eliminated at the “paper screening” phase (Bugg, 2010). Be that as it may, conflict emerges when Black men attempt to achieve academic success because of double consciousness (Dubois, 1996; Hickman, 2008; Flowers, 2006; Pope, 2006). Black men experience double consciousness because they are trying to identify with being both Black and American. For example, Strayhorn (2008) found that more than 75% of Black collegians attend predominately White institutions and experience a double dilemma of proving how much they belong in college (p. 375). Harper (2009) asserted Black male students are “niggered” on predominately White campuses in various ways (p. 698). He points out

Black men in college are constantly told they are unlikely to accomplish much in life and being successful in school is an anomaly for them (Harper, 2009, p. 698).

Scholars suggest school is perceived as an anomaly for Black men in America because they have a negative social status (Cose, 2011; 2002; Dubois, 1903; hooks, 2004; Ladson-Billing, 2006). According to Hickman (2008) and Sabol, Minton, and Harrison (2008) having a negative social status is why African American men are six times more likely to be put in jail than to go to college. Jordan (2008) declares Black men often learn about these negative statistics when they are children and as a result, these unwanted lessons cause Black men to become conscious about the unpleasant stigmas society has about them. Because Black men are aware that there are negative stereotypes about them and their families, they begin to have conflicting challenges about their racial identity during their attempt for academic success. Scholars such as Dubois (1996); Jackson (2008); Mitchell and Means (2014); and Pope (2006) describe these conflicting challenges as double consciousness.

Double consciousness. According to scholars such as Hickman (2008) and Billingsley and Billingsley (1965), race is a major crisis in the Black family. Scholars have found Black families' protection from a catastrophic racial encounter is to teach duality or double consciousness (Billingsley & Billingsley, 1965; Crosbie-Burnett & Lewis, 1993; Dubois, 1996; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Reynolds, 2010; Toomer, 1975). Dubois (1996) defines double consciousness as “always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (p. 5). It is the feeling of being Black and an American. Johnson (2013) and Hickman (2008) define double consciousness as understanding one’s self, and also

understanding one's surroundings. Swaidan (2010) defines double consciousness as a metaphor to explain the burden of race and racism on African Americans in American society.

According to Dubois (2006), an African American male is “sort of a seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second-sight in this American world, -a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world” (p. 9). Dubois suggests double consciousness is a peculiar sensation of “measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (p. 9). He points out Black men experiencing this peculiar sensation must live a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes which must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretense or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism.

By the same token, a visceral description of double consciousness is the dilemma of having to choose a salient identity as an American or as an African American continually forced to consciously or unconsciously decide where to expend energy (Swaidan, 2010). The process of expending this energy has been described as walking a “racial tightrope” (Swaidan, 2010). Double consciousness can also be exhausting because it creates an extreme desire to excel. It generates a sensation that to be an African American is to bear the race burden. It places African Americans in a precarious status. Double consciousness reveals African Americans are limited to a glass ceiling, which will require them to not challenge the dominant culture and to wear a mask to conceal their feelings, motives, and thoughts.

On the other hand, Crosbie-Burnett and Lewis (1993) use the term bicultural experience to identify double consciousness. They describe the bicultural experience as individuals learning at least two sets of behaviors, to exchange expectations and roles within society (p. 245). These scholars believe that the bicultural experience causes ambiguity of one's self and one's roles in the African American family (p. 245). Depending upon an African American's family income, there can be a third set of cultural experiences, which are based on class. As a matter of fact, Pope (2006) indicated that in higher education many Black male students (especially at the community college level) are first-generation students from adverse backgrounds. He asserts that the effects of double consciousness and their adverse experiences create triple consciousness, which can have a significant impact on their success (p. 227).

According to Hickman (2008), double consciousness keeps most African American men from actively participating in the educational pipeline toward upward mobility because they are reminded of the strong possibility of academic failure (p. 22). He asserts that for many Black men, their experience through the educational pipeline consists of adopting a White way of thinking to be successful (Hickman, 2008). Mosby (2009) found Black men in college are trying to balance living within two groups and are challenged because they have to embrace one identity while abandoning their cultural identity (p. 7). They are "performing self-checks regularly to ensure that personal behaviors do not substantiate possible stereotypes those of the majority often subscribe to in relation to the minority" (Reynolds, 2010, p. 154). Historically, when African Americans enroll in school the thought of inferiority has been drilled into them in almost every class and every book they study (Woodson, 1933). For this reason, hooks (2004)

points out that too often Black males are unable to achieve success because they “are unable to think creatively about their lives because of uncritical acceptance of narrow life-scripts shaped by patriarchal thinking” (p. 86).

Pursuing this further, Jordan (2008) found that managing double consciousness is a struggle for African American men because their dialect and environment can create multi-consciousness (p. 90). Mitchell and Means (2014) declare that certain Black males experience more than double consciousness or triple consciousness. According to Mitchell and Means (2014), “Dubois’ theory of double consciousness does not address the intersections and implications of sexual orientation and its impact on the identity development of Black gay and bisexual men” (p. 28). As a result, Mitchell and Means suggest Black male students who are gay or bisexual have to move between four dominant states of consciousness. These scholars assert Black male students who are gay or bisexual “seek acceptance and do not want to be stereotyped, harmed, outed, or ostracized” (p. 29). Mitchell and Means (2014) declare Black males who try to achieve academic success while experiencing these multiple levels of consciousness are really experiencing quadruple consciousness (p. 29).

Nevertheless, Billingsley and Billingsley (1965) argued that no matter how privileged and established a Black person or family is, it is extremely difficult to escape prejudice and discrimination (p. 314). For example, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU; n.d.) describes the educational pipeline Black men participate in as a school-to-prison pipeline that systematically makes it difficult for Black men to achieve academic success. In fact, scholars suggest the educational pipeline has an effect on Black men because they experience the school-to-prison pipeline more than any other ethnic group

(Sturm, Skolnick, & Wu, 2010). Mosby (2009) points out that the American educational system, arguably, can be seen as a power system that structures and assigns paths to students depending on their class within society (p. 10). Equally important, the educational system has long been viewed as a system that teaches propaganda that kills the aspirations of African Americans and dooms them to vagabonds and crime (Woodson, 1933, p. 6). Not only has the educational system been identified as a killer of aspirations, research argues “no one seems to know of a way to effectively and consistently engage young Black males in classrooms” (Kazembe, 2014, p. 36). According to Hickman (2008), the school-to-prison pipeline increases the double consciousness of Black men because it reminds them of stereotypes and the social status they have as being Black and American in society.

On the other hand, Dubois’ theory of double consciousness should be viewed as a positive experience for African Americans. According to Gooding-Williams (2009) Dubois’ theory of double consciousness should also be viewed as a gift (p. 78). For example, in *The Souls of Black Folks*, Dubois (1996; 2006) stated African Americans are “born with a veil, and gifted with a second-sight in this American world” (p. 9). The gift of second-sight is the ability to see the world as it is disclosed to the sight of a social group different than one’s own (Gooding-Williams, 2009, p. 78). Gooding-Williams (2009) points out Dubois’ reference of second-sight describes African Americans’ ability to see reality as White Americans see it, and they can see themselves and as White Americans see them (p. 78). In fact, Dubois concludes that second-sight provides a desire for African Americans to be both Black and American without being cursed, spit upon, or having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in their face (p. 9).

In a final analysis, the complexity of double consciousness has been influential on African Americans' identity. It amplifies the realization African Americans are considered a "problem" in our society (Black, 2012; Delgado, 1992; Dubois, 1996; 2006; Ervin, 2008; Gooding-Williams, 2009; Hickman, 2008; Post, 1990; Swaidan, 2010; Woodson, 1933). Yet, it strengthens the ambition of African Americans to achieve academically and professionally despite discovering that any time African Americans take the risk of playing a game with opponents who have the ability to change the rules at anytime.

Campus climate. Although research describes the plight of African American men as complex, research also indicates that campus climate affects the condition of African Americans (Evans, 1993; Johnson, 1993; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Pope, 2006; Wood, 2010; 2011; 2012). For this reason, Hagedorn, Maxwell, and Hampton (2007) declared that integration is a key component to student success. These scholars and Glenn (2007) challenged community colleges to develop policies specifically aimed at the African American male population because when Black men enroll in college they are not just receiving an education based on academic knowledge, their experience in college also prepares them to understand themselves as individuals in society. They are learning to accept being a noticeable target in a classroom setting or environment. They are learning how to manage their time and communicate with others who do not resemble themselves. However, Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, Thomas, and Thompson (2004) point out that being in a predominately White campus environment affects the comfort level of Black students. Their study emphasizes that there are five major themes Black undergraduates usually experience at predominantly White

institutions. These themes are: a) unfairness/sabotage/condescension; b) isolation and connection; c) believing they are different; d) having to prove they are worthy to be here; e) invisibility and supervisibility.

What is clear from the Davis et al. (2004) study is that all of the themes are interwoven with race. In fact, their study found Black students have a desire to be in classes with Black instructors. According to Hickman (2008) the desire for African American male students to have Black instructors is generated because “Black men face a wheel of oppression while attending predominantly White institutions” (p. 29). This wheel consists of Black men internalizing institutionalized racism, balancing the positives and negatives of socializing within a predominantly White setting, and losing their identity. Hickman also points out that the wheel of oppression impacts the basic needs of African American men’s social pride and language.

Other scholars identify the environmental effects Black men experience as a “double dilemma” once enrolled at predominantly White colleges (Harper, 2009; Jackson, 2005; Mitchell & Means, 2014; Strayhorn, 2008). Feagin and Sikes (1995) emphasized Black students are pressured to adapt to White culture and White middle-class ways of talking, dressing, and acting. Loo and Rolison (1986) declared that minorities in college are pressured to acquire White, middle-class values and to reject their own (p. 65). According to McGrath and Tobia (2008), pressure to reject one’s culture is created at community colleges because community colleges lack the necessary research strategies needed to learn about the dimension of their campus environments. In fact, Feagin and Sikes (1995) asserted that part of the reason colleges lack the necessary research strategies is because White administrators, faculty members, staff, and students

have shown little willingness to incorporate Black values, interests, or history into the core of campus culture (p. 91). They also argue that some Black parents do not prepare students for the racial challenges in a White college setting (p. 92). These researchers believe some Black families try to protect their children from this experience with the hope the conditions have improved since they were in college (p. 92).

In addition, research also points out White college students firmly believe negative stereotypes about Black youngsters and most of their views were learned before they came to college (Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, Thomas, and Thompson, 2004). According to Gabbion and Peterson (2006), Black men have historically suffered from racism and have reported that being Black plays a stressful role in their quality of life. As a result, too often Black men in the United States are powerless, land-less, and moneyless, which makes them virtually incapable of achieving the American dream (Madhubuti, 1991). Research suggests African Americans' inability to achieve the American dream is by design (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Evans, 1993). Evans (1993) suggests, "Black men have not been trusted by mainstream culture to be educated because education is a means of empowerment" (p. 507). Moreover, she points out Black males are already perceived as a physically and sexually aggressive force and empowered African Americans would "pose an unacceptable threat to dominant norms of racial purity and intellectual superiority" (Evans, 1993, p. 507). To that end, Gabbidon and Peterson (2004) draw from Thompson and Neville's (1999) work that there are three forms of racism in Black students' experiences. The three forms of racism are individual racism, cultural racism, and environmental racism.

Individual racism is “acts of discrimination and personal acts of humiliating or degrading an individual based on his or her racial group membership” (Gabbidon & Peterson, 2006, p. 86). Cultural racism is “the belief that the White culture is superior to other cultures” (p. 86). Environmental racism is when “policies and practices related to the environment place communities of color in the midst of deadly pollutants” (p. 87). For Black men, these forms of racism can cause some men to refrain from striving for upward mobility. Moreover, racial situations limit their ambition for success because of fear of humiliation. In fact, it is a travesty that some Black men do not feel accepted and are perceived as inferior in any setting (The College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, 2010). Our Declaration of Independence states that all men are created equal, therefore, Black men should be as comfortable obtaining a degree at a predominately White college the same as they would at a historical Black college.

Although all men should be treated equally, Billingsley and Billingsley (1965) reported Black families have to teach coping methods such as double consciousness to prepare their children for racial experiences (p. 316). These scholars found that the earlier in life Black families develop their children’s ability to cope with being Black in a White society, the stronger and more viable their life will be to accomplish impossible tasks (p. 316). According to scholars, Black men who accomplish the task of earning a college degree are not just creating upward mobility for themselves, they are sharpening their minds, uplifting their inner spirit, and providing balance to societal inequalities (Cose, 2011; Cuyjet, 2006; Harvey, 2002; hooks, 2004; Wilson, 2009).

On the other hand, Allen (1985) found that too many Black men value the development of social skills over academic skills, which often results in disastrous school

performance (p. 144). However, Sands and Schuh (2007) found the most serious problems concerning Black students is the necessity to create their own school and cultural networks given exclusion from the wider university community (p. 198). They report that students of color may not have a peer group with whom to associate, which also may contribute to adjustment challenges (p. 198). Consequently, African American students having adjustment challenges is not a new phenomenon; research points out that historically Black students have never fared well on predominantly White college campuses (Allen, 1985; 1992; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Harper, 2010; Jackson, 2011; Loo & Rolison, 1986). In fact, researchers have characterized the fit between Black students and White colleges a poor one (Davis, 1994; McKinely & Brayboy, 2003; Strayhorn, 2008). For instance, Bonner and Bailey (2006) note African Americans who attend predominantly White institutions describe the classroom and institutional environments as inhospitable. Research suggests Black students on Black campuses have an advantage over Black students on White campuses because Black students exhibit more positive psychological adjustments, significant academic gains, and greater cultural awareness than Black students at White colleges (Allen, 1985; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006).

Although research advocates Black men are better suited at Black colleges, these students should be able to excel at community colleges because community colleges share similar objectives. For instance, Black colleges pride themselves on transforming underprepared students into intellectuals (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006). By the same token, community colleges provide a pathway for individual mobility (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Pope, 2006; Wood, 2013). In fact, researchers identify

community colleges as essential to the transformative educational progress of people of lower academic ability, lower income, and other characteristics that limit their opportunity for postsecondary enrollment (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Pope, 2006; Wood, 2013). With this in mind, Flowers (2006) points out Black male four-year students have the same motives as community college Black male students for attaining a college degree.

While community colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) share some similar objectives, when Black men attend predominately White colleges, the race problem occurs. At White colleges, Black men have lower persistence rates, lower academic achievement levels, and lower likelihood of enrolling in advanced degree programs because they have poor psychosocial adjustments. Oftentimes these psychological adjustments suggest Black students do not fit at White colleges (Allen, 1985; Davis, 1994; Sands & Schuh, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006). Unfortunately, this problem will remain until predominately White institutions stop preaching diversity without exercising diversity. Exercising diversity may consist of hiring more minority faculty, administrators, and creating professional development programs that increase race-conscious educators (Harper, 2009; Harris & Wood, 2013; Pope, 2006; Wood, 2013).

According to research, Black men enroll in college because it provides a means to an end and an answer to their need for academic intelligence, financial stability, and a better quality of life (Harvey, 2002; Wilson, 2009). However, research also indicates that too many Black men are unable to have a better quality of life because they often leave campus before they are able to graduate (Flowers, 2006; Glenn, 2007; Hagedorn,

Maxwell & Hampton, 2007; Pope, 2006). Moreover, scholars report that the primary reasons minorities consider dropping out are student-faculty relationships, dissatisfaction with the academic quality of their education, cultural alienation, academic unpreparedness, and isolation from other minorities (Glenn, 2007; Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton 2007; Harris & Wood, 2013; Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson & Mugenda, 2007; Loo and Rolison, 1986; Sands & Schuh, 2007; Wood, 2013).

According to research, another indication for why many Black male students are unable to achieve a better quality of life is because they often experience a “cooling out” process at community colleges (Clark, 1960; Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Pope, 2006). According to Pope (2006), “cooling out” is a practice postulated by Clark in 1960 that refers to community college officials encouraging students to pursue vocational and remedial tracks rather than transfer programs (p. 216). It is a procedure institutions use to “let down hopes gently and unexplosively” (Clark, 1960, p. 547). Clark (1980) implicated that the cooling out process helps to “legitimize inequality by using academic standards in hidden ways to block the upward mobility of the poor and the minorities” (p. 26). As a result, many African American male students receive an education that prepares them for occupations that relegate them to lower-middle to middle-class jobs with little opportunity for advancement (Page, 2010; Pope, 2006).

On the other hand, research attributes most Black collegians’ attrition to the feeling of having to prove themselves in college because of the lack of support (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Cuyjet, 2006; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2007; Harris & Wood, 2013; Pope, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008; Wood, 2013). According to Wood (2013) this also affects Black men who do not drop out. In fact, research points out that regardless of

whether Black male students attend 2-year or 4-year colleges and exhibit motivation for high achievement, Black males do not produce higher college grade point averages (Flowers, 2006; Woods, 2013). Given these points, researchers found that minority students believe the most university support they can receive is through a student support service such as an Educational Opportunity Program (Loo & Rolison, 1986; Pope, 2006).

Black Male Structural and Cultural Factors

Although research suggests campus climate affects the academic progress of Black men, there are also outside forces such as financial instability and racism that tarnish the quality of life of these students seeking to attain a degree. For example, Richards (2007) asserts that unaffordable housing has a negative impact on academic success of African American male students. Wood and Williams (2013) point out that when Black male students have greater levels of familial responsibilities, students are less likely to persist. Despite familial responsibilities, research also suggest Black men often come from families that have two prevalent stressors, which are racism and discrimination (Black & Darling, 2000; Crawley 1998).

In 1965, Billingsley and Billingsley claimed there were six major social transitions that affected members of the Black family (p. 310). They declared that each social transition represents a major crisis in the Black family and began from (a) transitioning from Africa to America during slavery; (b) during slavery to emancipation (c) moving from rural to urban areas; (d) shifting from the south to north to the west; (e) having negative to positive social status; and (f) having negative to positive self-images (p. 310). Although the legal inhumane treatment of African Americans is over, in higher education two of the six major social transitions are still relevant. According to research,

members of Black families still have to deal with transitioning toward positive social status and self-images (Dabney-Smith, 2009; Decuir & Dixon, 2004; Flowers, 2006; Harper, 2009; Jordan, 2008; Mitchell & Means, 2014; Peters, 2004; Pope, 2006; Wellbrock, 1997; Wood, 2011). As a matter of fact, researchers declare African Americans are often marginalized while enrolled in colleges and universities because of microaggressions they experience during their quest for degree attainment (Harper, 2006; 2012; Smith, 2010; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). With this in mind, research asserts that the effects of these experiences have caused Black men to become known as the most disengaged population on campuses (Harper, 2006).

In order to create a paradigm shift for African American men to become engaged on campus, they must be embraced and accommodated (Barr & Schuetz, 2008). Barr and Schuetz (2008) suggest the current paradigm of community colleges is counterproductive because too often community colleges view underprepared students as the problem. Delia Amen (2011) asserts that students at community colleges are marginalized and become disengaged because of institutional designations. According to Harbour and Ebie (2011), students may be marginalized as a result of institutional policies or practices that intentionally or unintentionally subordinate students because of their status or identity. An example of this might be when a college chooses to place noncredit, short-term, service training programs, such as banquet server preparation, in African American communities but not in White communities (Harbour & Ebie, 2011).

Students may also be marginalized because of their identity or status by the conscious or unconscious behavior of individuals (Harbour & Ebie, 2011). For example, African American students can be marginalized when an instructor's racial and ethnic

prejudices discount their culturally significant experiences. In fact, Harbour and Ebie (2011) assert that student marginalization occurs at times and places where students are most vulnerable, which is usually when seeking help and guidance from others. As a result, McGrath and Tobia (2008) point out that community colleges have much work still to be done if they want to fulfill their democratic promise to low-income students and students of color. These scholars suggest community colleges are border zones in which students must negotiate the transition between the values, beliefs, and practices of their home culture with the institution they are entering (McGrath & Tobia, 2008). In other words, scholars suggest community colleges are underprepared for underprepared students (Levin, 2008; McGrath & Tobia, 2008; Schuetz, 2008; Shugart & Romano, 2008). However, if community college administrators want students to succeed they must revise their institutional research to better understand challenges their students face and formulate new strategies to improve academic and social engagement (Glenn, 2007; McGrath & Tobia, 2008)

On the other hand, researchers suggest there are structural and cultural factors that prevent Black men from achieving upward mobility in society (Evans, 1993; Johnson, 1993; Wilson, 2009). For example, recently the United States Supreme Court was challenged with making a decision on the University of Michigan Law School's affirmative action and admissions policies because minority students (particularly African Americans) were being admitted over their White counterparts (Krislov, 2003; Bollinger & Cantor, 1998). Their decision was to remove race as a factor for minority law students to enroll into law school. This decision was based on the belief that students should be accepted by their academic merit instead of a holistic approach, which is

unfortunate because scholars have found Black students do not receive the same education as their White counterparts in society (Harper, 2009; 2008; 2007; 2006, 2005; Wilson, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008; Landson-Billings, 2006; Davis, 1994; Kunjufu, 1989). Consequently, referring to students' academic merit as a tool for enrollment results in many Black students having to overcome or confront a roadblock to enter a financially secure profession.

Pursuing this further, a structural roadblock such as being unable to obtain a financially secure profession is one reason why there is a continuous pattern of African American men having the lowest employment-population ratio compared to other major race and ethnic groups (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012; 2013). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) reports African American men at every level of education were more likely to be unemployed than Whites or Asians. These findings are confirmation that although there is equal access to higher education, attaining desirable employment with higher earnings continues to be a dream for many African Americans. In addition, these findings also strengthen Woodson's (1933) historic declaration that African Americans are mis-educated and have received the greatest indictment because they have learned little as to making a living, which is the first essential to civilization.

Given these points, researchers have found that external factors have a direct influence on the success of Black males in community college (Harris & Wood, 2013; Wood, 2010). For example, research indicates critical factors such as peer-group influence, family influence and support, identity development, and self-perception have an impact on the institutional climate experienced by African American male students (Bonner & Bailey, 2006). According to research, African American male students who

have positive self-images obtain their development from family role models and those who have helped them construct their purpose in life (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Watson, 2006). For this reason, African Americans who acquire cultural knowledge within and outside of their household have a higher likelihood for success (Mosby, 2009; Gerbu, 2009). To put it differently, the more social capital a student accumulates, the more likely he is to become motivated, engaged, and successful in school (Gerbu, 2009, p. 55). Although this may be true, research points out that many African Americans are a part of the working class who lack the cultural capital that is beneficial to the academic success of African American men (Moby, 2009).

In order to repair the educational attainment of Black men, Dubois (1996) advocated Black people “ought not to be asked to race with the world but, rather allowed time and thought to attend to its own social problems” (p. 11). The social problem of African Americans begins with too many Black men being conscious of their inability to conquer the American dream. Whether this problem was created internally or externally through structural or cultural factors, Black male students’ lack of success in college is an emerging pattern of self-destruction not just for the Black community, but for America.

Black Male Resilience

In 2010, the College Board Advocacy and Policy Center suggested that there are “Three Americas,” one characterized by opportunity and wealth, and another characterized by significant social and economic strife (p. 2). The third America has been recognized as primarily male, and comprised of mostly men of color. These men have been identified as living “outside of the margins of our economic, social and cultural systems” (p. 2). They have been labeled as the byproduct of many societal failures

including the failure of our nation's schools. Under those circumstances, the College Board Advocacy and Policy Center reports that only 26% of African Americans have at least an associate degree.

In 2013, the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) reported that there were over 45,000 Black men who graduated from a community college (NCES, 2014). According to Trammel, Newhart, Willis and Johnson (2008) in order for Black men to attain a college degree they must stay positive, have ambition, and have determination to overcome obstacles. Harper's (2005) study of high-achieving African American male students suggests Black men at 4-year colleges are successful when they are active on campus. He reports that one Black male student believes that his greatest lessons and refinement came outside of the classroom. Similarly, Harris and Wood (2013) found African American male community college students have greater odds of persistence or attainment when "they become immersed in the academic experience" (p. 117). Another key point suggests Black men who are enrolling in community colleges are seeking to gain knowledge, become reliable men for their future families, and are maneuvering under a revolutionary mentality (Madhubuti, 1991). Overall, the mindset of African American male students and the lessons learned are the final product in the making of a man (Dubois, 1996).

Pursuing this further, research suggests Black men demonstrate their resilience and are defying odds when they enroll in college (Geburu, 2009). For example, Wood and Williams (2013) suggests Black men in community colleges are more likely to be older, be classified as low-income, have dependents, be married, and have delayed their enrollment in higher education. Other scholars point out that while enrolled in college,

Black men are challenged with overcoming double consciousness, stereotype threat, racism, and socioeconomics to be successful (Bush, 2004; Bush & Bush, 2010; Cuyjet, 2006; Decuir & Dixon, 2004; Delgado, 1995; Harris & Wood, 2013; Hickman, 2008; Pope, 2006; Steele, 1999). These challenges are so severe that McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman (2001) describe the chance for Black men to succeed academically as the equivalent to being able to duck a bullet. However, when Black men enroll in community colleges they want to feel a sense of “somebodiness” (Harris & Wood, 2013). They are enrolling in college to find their identity and to influence others (especially family members) to do the same (Wood, 2010; Jordan, 2008; Hampton, 2002; Wellbrocks, 1997). Cohen and Brawer (2008) wrote, “there can be little doubt that although most students attend community colleges to better themselves financially, a sizable percentage are there for reasons of personal interest having nothing to do with direct fiscal benefit” (p. 60). For example, Jordan (2008) reveals Black men have a self-awareness that allows them to persist during troubling times. He indicates that the Black men who persist in higher education oftentimes believe there are too many negative perceptions about their ethnicity and gender; they have an internal passion to convince others that the perceptions about them are inaccurate.

In light of Black male students trying to persist, it is clear that it is not an easy challenge to overcome. According to research, when Black male students enroll in predominately White institutions, they are oftentimes the only Black person in a classroom (Brown, 2007; Cuyjet, 2006; Jackson, 2005; Harris & Wood, 2013; Hickman, 2008; Peters, 2004; Wood & Hilton, 2012). Jackson (2005) argues that under these circumstances Black men would be expected to feel lost or unable to excel in

environments like these because they do not have the ability to identify with individuals that reflect their image. He declares that ideology is wrong and suggests Black men in college seem to be more enthusiastic about being in environments that do not reflect their likeness. Research by Jackson suggests in situations like this:

Self-awareness often begins with the feeling of being lost. We find our “selves” by losing our “selves.” While many fear that they will lose their home cultures when they are immersed in another culture, in fact, exactly the opposite is true. (Jackson, 2005, p. 19)

In other words, Jackson’s theory posits Black male college students’ self-confidence increases because they are conscious that they are progressing toward becoming a part of an elite group, which will confirm their spot in society. Dubois (1903) identified this elite group as the talented tenth. The talented tenth is an elite group that escalates and “pulls all that are worth the saving up to their vantage ground” (p. 80). Hickman (2008) describes these types of men as “freemen, free of any enslavement of mind, body and soul” (p. 24). He declares these men are the “graduates of African American society” (p. 24). For instance, Black male leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., Booker T. Washington, Medgar Evers, Fredrick Douglass, Thurgood Marshall, Johnny Cochran, Malcolm X, Senator Corey Booker and President Barack Obama would be considered as members of this elite group under Hickman’s description. Moreover, Dubois’ (1903) rationale suggests Black men pursuing education in an environment where Black men are limited can cause these men to feel as if their education and work is the lever for uplifting themselves in society and to become a spokesperson for their culture.

Self-Initiative. In order for a minority group to believe they can uplift the masses they must first have self-confidence. The self-confidence of Black men in college can also be equated to self-initiative. Marcus Garvey (1987) defined self-initiative as “an individual’s duty to fall back on himself for what he wants” (p. 277). Garvey declared an individual who fails to be true to himself in taking the initiative to manage things for himself will ultimately find out that “he has been an easy target for others” (p. 277). In 2004, Oates studied the self-esteem and self-efficacy of Black students and believes they correlate but are different. He refers to self-esteem as “feelings of acceptance, self-respect, and general positive self-evaluation” (p. 16). He describes self-efficacy as one’s efforts to “master challenges and make things happen in life” (p. 16). However, Oates’ study suggested Black students self-esteem is realistically either on par with White students or slightly higher; but self-efficacy consistently trails.

Institution fit. On the other hand, there is research that suggests it is not the self-initiative of Black male students that determines academic success; it is the support they receive from an institution that advances their academic abilities (Dabney-Smith, 2009; Mosby, 2009; Pope, 2006; Harper, 2009; Harris & Wood, 2013; Steele, 1999; Wood, 2010). For example, research that examined Black student life on a Black campus and a White campus found that on White campuses Black men are usually easy targets for mistreatment (Allen, 1992). Harper (2009) suggests institutions mistreat Black men because they do not have enough representatives to support them. In fact, at the community college level, research suggests students have less social integration than at four-year colleges (Flowers, 2006; Harris & Wood, 2013; Mosby, 2009; Pope, 2006; The Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014; Wood, 2013). Consequently,

these findings can be linked to why five percent (5%) of Black males attending community college earn a certificate or degree within three years compared to thirty-two percent (32%) of White males (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014).

In general, most students who enroll at community colleges do so because they provide educational progress for people of lower academic ability, lower income, and other characteristics that limit their opportunity for selective postsecondary enrollment (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Bass, 2011; Adams-Mahaley, 2012). According to research, Black men are enrolling in community colleges because of various academic reasons; some students enroll because they were denied from the first college they wanted to attend, while others transfer to a community college because they were not prepared, academically successful, or mature enough to handle their responsibilities (Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, Thomas, & Thompson, 2004; Harris & Wood, 2013; Pope, 2006; Wood, 2010; 2013). Despite the ways Black men enter college, Garvey (1987) and Dubois (1996) point out that the effect of not attaining an education is harmful because Black men need education in order to become responsible citizens in society. For example, Garvey states:

It is by education that we become prepared for our duties and responsibilities in life. If one is badly educated he must naturally fail in the proper assumption and practice of his duties and responsibilities because the “Negro have been badly educated” (Garvey, 1987, p. 264).

In the same way Garvey (1987) suggests Black students are badly educated, Mosby (2009) advocates that in schools Black students are perceived as the victims, powerless to

the structures that surround their lives, which in turn causes them to abandon academics and not achieve. Scholars also highlight that the educational experience Black male students have in America is more than inadequate, it affects their self-initiative and makes it difficult for them to make decisions that fulfill responsibilities and duties needed for their academic conquest and financial prosperity (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Harper, 2009; Harris & Wood, 2013; Pope, 2006; Madhubuti, 1991; Wilson, 2009; Wood, 2013; Wood & Hilton, 2012). To put it another way, research implies Black male students' self-initiative is considered as powerless (Harper, 2009; Wilson, 2009; Jackson, 2011; Thomas, Smith, Marks, & Crosby 2012). For instance, Jackson (2011) suggests Black men's self-efficacy diminishes when they are challenged in a new environment or have negative experiences. He suggests Black men who do enter college with high self-efficacy due to their academic performance in high school do not respond well to unsatisfactory results. Jackson advocates that if Black men have negative experiences transitioning from high school to college, the experience will overpower their self-initiative and cause them to surrender their aspirations for achieving success.

Nevertheless, if Black men do not attain a college degree, they are more likely to be incarcerated (The College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, 2010; Sabol, Minton, & Harrison, 2008). In 2008, Sabol, Minton, and Harrison reported Black men represent 41% of the 2 million men in jail. Hickman (2008) points out that many Black men face incarceration because of the pressure to succeed where their fathers failed. According to research, Black fathers fail Black men because they are consistently being raised under single parent female homes, which often trigger Black men to become depressed and self-conscious of their unfortunate situation, which creates a belief that they are unable to

achieve their maximum potential (Ball, 2010; Blake & Darling, 2000; Crawley, 1988; Hickman, 2008; King, 1998; Steele, 1999). For instance, Akbar (1980) pointed out that such pressure can become unbearable and can produce violent results such as homicide. He asserts that “homicide does not always result from a rational, premeditated, deliberate process, with people acting on the basis of conscious determinates; instead homicides often involve a situational process” (p. 554). In other words, if Black men are unable to attain an education or lack the traditional support systems such as spiritual guidance and family, their sense of helplessness can result in them becoming dangerous, resentful, and unable to find value in achieving academic success.

On the other hand, research suggests strong predictors of African American male student success are associated with institutional belonging and upbringing (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Harris & Wood, 2013; Hickman, 2008; Pope, 2006; Wood, 2013; Wood & Hilton, 2012). Research points out Black male students with strong ethnic identities are able to integrate at an institution in spite of their self-initiative being overpowered (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Jackson, 2011; Pope, 2006; Thomas, Smith, Marks, & Crosby, 2014). According to research, the strength of Black men’s ethnic identity comes from seven themes that their families use to influence members to achieve success (Mosley-Howard & Evans, 2000). The seven themes are (a) reliance on tradition to raise children; (b) valuing the connection of extended family; (c) having pride in cultural heritage; (d) teaching about racism; (e) negotiating between two cultures; (f) valuing an education; and (g) having spirituality beliefs (p. 439). In addition, research points out that many Black parents prepare their children to be resilient in their quest for attaining a college degree by giving advice, developing study skills and habits, choosing

selective schools and programs for their children, and teaching them to set priorities and be responsible, while managing race relations to prepare them for the future (Barnett, 2004; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Watson, 2006).

Given these points, if Black male students are going to be academically successful, research declares that high achieving Black male students' resilience and college achievement are almost always going to be attributed to (1) God; (2) themselves; (3) their parents; and (4) their peers (Harper, 2006, p. 347). Then again, these findings are based on Black male students at 4-year institutions. According to research, the experience of Black male students at 4-year and 2-year colleges "are the same...but different" (Wood, 2013, p. 58). For instance, research indicates Black male 4-year students have significantly higher educational aspirations than their 2-year college counterparts (Flowers, 2006; Wood, 2013). However, if Black male community college students are going to continue to enhance their success in community college, they must have the right frame of mind (Wood & Hilton, 2012). Researchers found Black male community college students believe that being focused, committed, and engaged in academic work will produce academic success in school (Wood & Hilton, 2012). To put it another way, Black male community college students will not achieve success unless they are determined to achieve it. In the long run, research suggests the resilience of African American men can be established by separating themselves from in-school and out-of-school distractions, being resilient to barriers, and believing success in college is worth the effort (Wood & Hilton, 2012).

Summary

This literature review focuses on the experiences of Black men at a community college and in an EOF program. It identifies some of the challenges Black men encounter and provides some of the tools African American male students need to attain a college degree. Although community colleges service a large population of African Americans, there is a lack of research that examines the experiences of African American male students (Harris & Wood, 2013; Mosby, 2009; Wood, 2010; Wood & Hilton, 2012). The next chapter, which is the methodology section, will identify how this phenomenological study will be designed to offer recommendations to enrich the academic achievement of Black men. In addition, the methodology chapter will provide a protocol for finding what perceptions Black men believe can help them achieve advancement in higher education at a community college.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the lived experience of Black men at a community college in an Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), the national graduation rate for the 2010 cohort of community college students that graduated in three years was 29%. However, Black male students a part of this cohort had a graduation rate of 19%. This statistic suggested the degree attainment of Black men in community colleges is dismal and is a phenomenon that needs to be examined. Research indicated some of the reasons Black male students do not succeed academically are because of college readiness, socioeconomic status, institutional climate, and lack of diversity (Gebru, 2009; Jordan, 2008; Pope, 2006; The Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014; Wood, 2010).

Although there are several reasons linked to why Black males do not succeed academically, this study examined the effects of double consciousness because scholars suggest it impacts the academic success of Black men seeking to graduate from community colleges (Mosby, 2009; Pope, 2006; Wood, 2010). According to research, the African American community identifies double consciousness as a dual role African Americans face in American society (Dubois, 1996; Harper, 2009; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Pope, 2006). It is “the understanding of one’s self, and also the understanding of one’s surroundings” (Hickman, 2008, p. 23). It is a person’s ability to be “completely aware of the perceptions of others in one’s environment, whether they are negative or positive” (Hickman, 2008, p. 23).

Pursuing this further, other scholars such as Skip Downing (2011) and Steele (1997; 1999) report oftentimes Black men do not achieve academic success compared to their counterparts because of stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is a fear that one's behavior in a particular situation confirms a negative stereotype about a cultural group to which an individual belongs (Downing, 2011). Toure (2011) describes stereotype threat as when an individual fears being judged by or living down to a stereotype. He declares, "stereotype threat alone is disruptive enough to negatively impact anyone's performance" (Toure, 2011, p. 82). With this in mind, many Black men experience these disruptive pressures, which lead them to underperform academically because they are often trying to prove that they belong in society (Steele, 1997; 1999).

In fact, double consciousness and stereotype threat are often linked as explanations to why many Black men do not succeed in college. Although these theories often explain the experiences Black men have in college, these concepts have predominately been linked to studies that examine the experiences of Black men enrolled at four-year colleges (Ervin, 2008; Jordan, 2008; Richards, 2007; Wood, 2010). On the other hand, Wilson (2009) links Black men's lack of success in education to constantly being confronted with racial barriers that cause them to remain in poverty, uneducated, unemployed, and incarcerated.

Other research suggests unstable family structures are linked to the decline of degree attainment of Black men (Allen, 1978; Allen, 1985; Barnett, 2004; Clery, 2008; Durhart & Fournillier, 2010; Hickman, 2008). For instance, researchers suggest when Black men are compared to Black women, Black men do not receive the same treatment from their families and the added pressure of being raised in a single female-headed

household can be a hindrance to Black men while trying to attain an education (Akbar, 1980; Allen, 1985; Davis, 1994; Telesford & Murray, 2008; Toomer, 1975). Telesford and Murray (2008) pointed out that when Black men lack a male figure in the household, Black mothers have to find alternative ways for educating their sons by telling stories of how their ancestors dealt with hardships; explaining how not displaying good morals and principles upset and disappoint them; and making them aware of the discrimination they may experience in their lifetime (p. 54). Consequently, when Black men do encounter discrimination as college students they often begin to regress in their studies (Adams-Maheley, 2012; Arron, 2011; Ball, 2010; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Brown-Ingles, 2003; Bush, 2004; Dubois, 1996; Harper, 2006; 2009; Harris & Wood, 2013; Johnson, 1993; Wood, 2010; 2011; 2012).

In light of all these studies, research seems to suggest the overarching problem that affects the educational attainment of Black men is how they are treated and perceived in society. Scholars have pointed out that there is a disparity in the treatment Black men receive during their pursuit of upward mobility (Allen, 1985; Dorsey, 1996; Dubois, 1996; Hampton, 2002; Harper, 2009; Harris & Wood, 2013; Jackson, 2005; King, 1998; Wood, 2013). For example, Johnson (1993) declares that most African Americans who choose to attend predominantly White institutions of higher education subject themselves to a “personal cost” in which their minority status puts them at a degree of risk that is not faced by White students (p. 364). He asserts that the personal cost African American students experience is being forced into hostile environments that are detrimental to their performance in college (p. 364). In addition, Myers (2012) reported African American

students are subjected to racial discrimination at levels greater than other racial minority students and these circumstances have a negative effect upon persistence.

This study examined the lived experiences of Black men at a community college in an EOF program to understand what can be used as a tool for adjusting practices and constructing a pathway that will encourage Black men to become resilient at attaining a college degree. In a way, using the findings of what Black men experience can also inject a long-term positive effect on society's perceptions of Black men because members of society such as college administrators, family members, and Black men will have more insight on the perseverance necessary for achieving academic success at a community college. Therefore, to examine the experience of Black men at a community college in an EOF program, this chapter presents the methodological procedures for a phenomenological study. Included in the procedures for this chapter will be the purpose of the phenomenological study, research questions, research site, research participants, procedures for data collection, treatment of the data, and a chapter summary.

To examine the lived experiences of Black men at a community college and in an EOF program, this study used double consciousness as its conceptual framework. Although double consciousness has been examined at four-year colleges, there is a lack of research about this phenomenon at community colleges (Pope, 2006; Wood, 2010). As a matter of fact, except for the recent research from the Community College Research Center at Columbia University's Teachers' College, research about Black male students is "focused almost entirely on four-year colleges" (Jordan, 2008, p. 3). As a result, this study is significant because it adds research about degree attainment and the experience of Black men attending community colleges.

Research Questions

In order to research the experiences of Black men at a community college in an EOF program three research questions were developed. These three questions are:

1. What are the lived experiences of Black men in an EOF program at a community college?
2. How do issues of race (double consciousness) impact the experiences of Black men in an EOF program at a community college?
3. What role does an EOF program play in the persistence of Black men enrolled in community college?

Research Design

The design of this research is from an advocacy and participatory worldview. According to Creswell (2009) this type of research contains an action agenda for reform that may transform the lives of participants and the researcher. This philosophical worldview also focuses on the need of raising consciousness and the needs of groups and individuals in our society that may be marginalized and disenfranchised. According to research, being marginalized is a major reason large numbers of Black men avoid pursuing higher education (Flowers, 2006; Harper, 2009; Steele, 1999; Wood, 2013). For instance, Johnson (1993) advocates that predominantly White colleges mask norms that create an environment in which African Americans are considered “them” or the “other” (p. 365). This study sought to examine the lived experiences of Black men enrolled in a community college because researchers suggest the Black male experience is different than other students’ experiences (Allen, 1985; Dubois, 1996; Glenn, 2007; Hagedorn,

Maxwell & Hampton, 2007; Hampton, 2002; Harper, 2009; Harris & Wood, 2013; Johnson, 1993; Pope, 2006; Steele, 1999; Strayhorn, 2008; Wood, 2010).

According to Creswell (2007) a phenomenological study is the appropriate research design to provide an examination of Black men at a community college because it can explore things like fear, philosophical orientation, and identify the meaning of students' experiences. Byrne (2001) declares the purpose of phenomenological research is to understand the essential truths of the lived experience. In fact, in its best form, "phenomenology presumes to add scientific knowledge using a subjectistic procedure" (Farber, 1962, p. 432). To put it another way, to engage in phenomenology "is to step beyond the realm of traditional issues addressed by the philosophy of action" (Collin & Kusch, 1995, p. 799). It is the form of research in "which it is important to understand several individuals' common or shared experience of a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 60).

Historically, it has been reported that Edmund Husserl's 1913 publication of *Ideen zu einer reinen Phanomenologie und phanomenologischen Philosophie* served as the launch of the phenomenological movement (Frank, 1979). The phenomenological movement was not a school, but a system that grouped practitioners committed to putting philosophy on intuitive grounds. According to research, the phenomenological approach entered the United States largely through theoretical descriptions and the term phenomenology was introduced in philosophy before works by Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel and reappeared in works by Max Weber (Frank, 1979).

Although, research points out Husserl launched the phenomenology approach, there is other research that considers Martin Heidegger as an influencer of this type of study (Tiryakian, 1965). In either case, research indicates that there is more than one element for conducting a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2007; 2009; Frank, 1979; Tiryakian, 1965). As a matter of fact, research suggests a phenomenological study: (a) is a pure description of social phenomena, (b) reduces phenomena to essential characteristics, and (c) provides meaningful core components of a non-social nature (Tiryakian, 1965, p. 680). According to Frank (1979) a phenomenological study operates in at least two ways: (a) presents a highly complex set of authentic relationships in the subject's experience, even if filtered through the investigators' reports or shaped by the elicitation and recording and (b) acknowledges the life history as a document, even if it begins from other documents and is dependent upon interpretation (p. 84). In other words, a phenomenological study is "based on assumptions only possibly shared by the subject and the investigator, since frequently life history texts attempt to make understood things that are difficult to communicate interpersonally as well as cross-culturally" (Frank, 1979, p. 84).

Given these points, researchers point out that the rejection of using natural, scientific, or empirical methodology for phenomenology "is the rejection of attempts to explain knowledge and man's relation to the world in causal terms of material qualities, mental contents, and mechanical stimulus-response operations" (Rosenthal & Bourgeois, 1977, p. 57). Since a phenomenological approach can explain a social phenomenon, analyze authentic relationships in a subject's experience, and acknowledge a subject's life history, this approach is best suited for this study.

Because this study focuses on the experience of a particular ethnic group and a specific gender, it is important that this study utilize double consciousness as its conceptual framework for examination. According to research, double consciousness is extremely important because it “keeps most African American males from actively participating in the educational pipeline” (Hickman, 2008). Generally speaking, most researchers would utilize critical race theory as their conceptual framework because it focuses attention on race and how racism is deeply embedded within the framework of society (Creswell, 2007). However, this study is designed to use double consciousness to examine the lived experience of Black men because it describes a peculiar sensation (Dubois, 1903; Gooding-Williams, 2009). Research points out that this peculiar sensation consists of being Black and American (Black, 2012; Dubois, 1903; Gooding-Williams, 2009; Hickman, 2008). For instance, research declares that many Black students believe educational achievement is a prerequisite for success in life, but they drop out of community college because they live in a society that denies them the right to own their history and culture (Peters, 2004). With this in mind, their lived experience “makes it difficult for them to participate fully in North American society” (Peters, 2004, p. 8). Pursuing this further, Derrick Bell (1988) points out that despite America’s rejection of doctrines such as “separate but equal” there are still viable passwords to discriminate against African Americans (p. 81). These passwords include terms such as “high entrance scores, seniority, and neighborhood schools” (p. 81). Since research suggests African Americans often incur a personal cost when they enroll in college, using double consciousness to examine the experiences that influence the persistence of Black men at a community college validates a narrative that advocates for the marginalized and

disenfranchised. In addition, using double consciousness in a phenomenological study is also beneficial because a phenomenological study is a highly structured approach for sensitive topics (Creswell, 2007).

Research Site

The research site for this study is a multi-campus community college located in New Jersey that, in the fall of 2013, had an ethnic student enrollment breakdown of 20% (2,477) White, non-Hispanic students; 26% (3,113) Black students; 32% (3,864) Hispanic students; .4% (52) American Indian students; 1% (136) Asian or Pacific Islander students; 3% (362) non-resident alien students. The total student enrollment population was 11,969 students, and the community college is considered a Minority Serving Institution (MSI) because 62% of its students come from another ethnic heritage besides White. The term MSI describes institutions that enroll a high proportion of African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students (as cited in Wood, 2010, p. 111). In 2013, the gender ratio for the community college in this study was 61% female and 38% male. Forty percent of the population was 18 to 21 years old. Ninety-seven percent of the students enrolled were from New Jersey and 81% of the students enrolled were residents of the same county as the community college. Forty-seven percent of the students were full-time students and 52% of the students were part-time.

On the other hand, unlike the student population, 73% of the faculty at the community college is White. However, since 1996, the percent of non-White faculty has increased from 14.7% to 27%. Fifty-nine percent of the community college's full-time faculty and 51% of part-time faculty are females. Sixty-eight percent of the faculty obtained a doctoral degree, 31% have earned a masters degree, and 1% have a bachelor's

degree. In addition, the community college is also considered a commuter institution because there are no residence halls.

Research Participants

In order for a phenomenological study to be conducted, participants were carefully selected and had experience in the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). The participants in this study are Black men in the state of New Jersey enrolled at Carter Community College (CCC) (a pseudonym) who participated in an EOF program.

In order to examine the experiences of Black men at a community college in an EOF program, a minimum 10 participants were selected to participate in the study (as shown in Table 2). The participants for this study were identified from their EOF application and were full-time Black male EOF students between the ages of 18 to 25 years old. The Black male EOF students for this study were all commuters and completed at least a semester at the community college. Eight out of 10 students were first-generation college students and two were reverse-transfer students. Reverse-transfer students are students that originally matriculated at a four-year institution and transferred to a community college for various reasons such as earning credits or attaining a college degree (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Another student was a stop-out student, which is a student who withdrew from college, then subsequently reenrolls at a later time (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014).

The recruitment protocol for this study consisted of a recruitment poster (see Appendix A) being placed on all three campuses of the research site. This poster had the researcher's contact information for Black male EOF students to inquire about becoming

participants. Black male students in the EOF program were also sent an invitation to participate in the study through email (see Appendix B) and by mail (see Appendix C).

Table 2

Participants' Demographics

Students	Academic Semester	Age	Major	Hometown	GPA
Carmelo	Second Semester	19	Liberal Studies	Plainfield, NJ	2.00
Gary	Second Semester	22	Liberal Studies	East Orange, NJ	2.20
Izzy	Second Semester	18	Engineering	Union, NJ	2.36
Jay	Third Semester	20	Liberal Studies	Rahway, NJ	2.40
Malik	Fourth Semester	23	Communications	Hillside, NJ	1.50
Marcus	Final Semester	21	Liberal Studies	Newark, NJ	3.68
Mike	Second Semester	18	Liberal Studies	Rahway, NJ	4.00
Omarion	Final Semester	22	Liberal Studies	Newark, NJ	3.46
Teddy	Third Semester	19	Engineering	Hillside, NJ	3.36
Zay	Fourth Semester	21	Business	Linden, NJ	2.22

Role of the Researcher

As a graduate of, alum of, and recruiter for an Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), I have experienced the benefits of support programs at the community college level, four-year college level, and as a graduate student. While participating in these programs, I have interacted with many African American men who did not take

advantage of the opportunities these support programs provide. Reflecting on my academic experiences has caused me to inquire why so many Black men did not become college graduates while research declares Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) programs can influence Black men to achieve academic success (Allen, 1976; Pope, 2006; Herndon & Hirt, 2004). Because there is inconsistency between my personal experiences and what research suggests, a more intensive investigation into the experiences of Black men pursuing a college degree was necessary.

In order to conduct a phenomenological study focusing on the lived experiences of individuals, research asserts the role of the researcher is to explicitly identify reflexive biases, values, and personal background (Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell (2007), a researcher recognizes and specifies broad philosophical assumptions of a phenomenon by bracketing out their own experiences. In fact, “bracketing out allows the researcher to see the data in their purest form” (Bazile, 2009, p. 48).

Consequently, as the researcher for this study, I must address my experience as a two-year college student in an Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) and identify that my experience as an undergraduate student at a two-year college was challenging because I was lacking academic preparation, having a low socioeconomic status, experiencing racism, and being stereotyped. Although my overall experience at the college was positive, these challenges were extremely unpleasant. For instance, when I enrolled in college, I had a high school grade point average of 69.8 and knew that my academic preparation was inadequate. Because I lacked academic preparation for college, I became extremely conscious about my academic ability and felt intense pressure to prove myself

on campus. In addition, my status as a student-athlete also made me feel that I had to prove to my counterparts that I was not a “dumb jock”.

In fact, Horton (2011) asserts that college athletes are often labeled as privileged, lazy, incapable, and disinterested students who are motivated to enroll in higher education only to participate in athletics. He suggests that student-athletes begin to accept and own these perceptions as reality, which is a process of stereotype threat (p. 27). However, in my case, this form of thinking was inaccurate. When I enrolled in college, I enrolled because I wanted to make something of myself. I wanted to attain a college degree to eventually earn an income that would provide me with the opportunity to live in a better neighborhood, travel the world, and possess the ability to provide for my family. In my view, playing basketball was just an added feature to my experience as a college student.

Although some of the pressures I experienced were self-inflicted, there were also instances when the campus environment, faculty members, staff, classmates, and the local community suggested that I did not belong. For example, as a student-athlete, a college official disclosed to me that administrators in the college’s athlete department wanted more Caucasian players instead of African Americans on the basketball team. There were also instances in which classmates called me derogatory names.

In light of these experiences, the college’s Educational Opportunity Program served as a place for academic assistance and comfort. While enrolled in EOP, I was able to connect with the staff and learn strategies to succeed in college. However, being a member of EOP also made me conscious that I had to prove myself. For instance, the EOP program was perceived as “the Black program” or “poor student program” on

campus by faculty, staff, and students. Although I was proud of the program and was succeeding in it, I witnessed students denouncing their membership, which made me question why students would not be proud of receiving help to better themselves. Because I viewed the EOP program as a service that would help me reach my goal of becoming a college graduate, I was successful. However, there were many African American students who shared my sentiments. Therefore, I want to examine the lived experiences of Black men in a community college in an EOF program because research suggests when Black men receive institutional support, they are more likely to be successful (Deil-Amen, 2011; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2007; Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, & Mugenda, 2007; Horton, 2011; McGrath & Tobia, 2008; Pope, 2006).

In conclusion, my role as researcher for this study was essential to the research process. For example, research points out that the role of the researcher is a key instrument to a study (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell (2007), the researcher's role is to collect data, examine documents, observe behavior, and interview participants (p. 38). Bracketing out my experiences as a two-year college student in an EOP program is to focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue and conduct an analysis that focuses on the central themes and findings from the research. According to research, the plight of Black men in higher education is a phenomenon that needed to be addressed and investigated at the community college level because it is the best way to consider how to change this dilemma (Jordan, 2008). In addition, examining this phenomenon at the community college level is extremely important because more Black men attend community colleges than four-year colleges (Jordan, 2008; Pope, 2006; Wood & Williams, 2013). Therefore, my role as the

researcher was to make sure that the collected data for this study focused on the experiences of the participants and not my own.

Conceptual Framework

According to Maxwell (2004), a conceptual framework is the “primary conception or model of what is out there” for a researcher to use to design his or her study (p. 33). The conceptual framework for this study utilized Dubois’ (1903) theory of double consciousness as a lens to examine the lived experiences of Black male students in an EOF program at a community college because since the early 20th century African American men have constantly negotiated their identity in America and in higher education to fit in (Mitchell & Means, 2014). According to research, utilizing double consciousness as the conceptual framework for this study is extremely important because it places emphasis on race and examines the lived experiences of African American students (Bell, 1988; 1998; Black, 2012; Cose, 2011; Dubois, 1996; Gooding-Williams, 2009; Johnson, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Mitchell & Means, 2014; Pope, 2006; Reynolds, 2010). As a matter of fact, researchers promulgate African American students’ experiences in class and out of class give validation to their identity (Dubois, 1903; Glenn, 2007; Hickman, 2008; Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, & Mugenda, 2007; Swaidan, 2010). In addition, scholars reveal the personal attributes that derail academic success are related to lack of positive self-esteem, low achievement motivation, cultural factors, poverty, and inadequate high school preparation (Dubois, 1903; Glenn, 2007; Hickman, 2008; Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, & Mugenda, 2007; Swaidan, 2010). Consequently, research points out African American male college students have at least two identities- one as an American capable of completing college level work, the other as an afflicted

person unsure of his potential (Dubois, 1903; Glenn, 2007; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2007; Pope, 2006; Swaidan, 2010; Wood, 2013).

Although research suggests there is a correlation between double consciousness, self-confidence, and retention, Pope (2006) asserted that some Black male students who matriculate at community colleges experience an additional level of consciousness referred to as triple consciousness. Triple consciousness pertains to first-generation students that are from adverse backgrounds (Pope, 2006). As a result of students attending college from unfavorable circumstances, researchers point out that an institution's organizational culture is also an important resource in promoting student success (Clark, 1960; 1965; McGrath & Tobia, 2008; Pope, 2006; Wood, 2013). For instance, an institutional barrier such as a failure to accommodate minority students' needs impacts their success (Glenn, 2007). In addition, Hampton (2002) declares the combination of barriers such as racial discrimination and lowered socio-economic status has a "double whammy" effect on Black males in community college.

Granted that research identifies double consciousness as a peculiar sensation that consists of a Black male seeing himself through the eye of others, the conceptual framework for this connects double consciousness and Pope's (2006) retention strategies together because it was specifically designed to keep Black male community college students engaged and motivated during their quest to successfully complete their program of study. According to Pope (2006), if institutions want to keep African American male community college students engaged and motivated during their quest for successful degree completion they should implement the following retention strategies: (a) increase academic and social integration; (b) eliminate racism and promote diversity; (c) assist

students with overcoming triple consciousness; (d) enhance counseling; (e) provide an effective orientation program; (f) evaluate program effectiveness; (g) hire more African American administrators, faculty, staff, and students; (h) create ethnic, cultural, and social support groups; and (i) create programs that connect with African American males' communities (p. 226).

By and large, including Pope's (2006) retention strategies in this conceptual framework is helpful because they represent the level of an institutions commitment to a specific group of students. As an example, one of Pope's strategies suggest if a community college wants to improve its retention of Black male students it must increase academic and social integration. Pope suggests academic and social integration is needed to establish students with a sense of community. Another recommendation is to eliminate racism and promote diversity. According to Pope (2006), becoming diversity consciousness is a ploy to develop programs and services in an environment that encourages members of an institutional community to become more diverse by providing proactive leadership in the development of curriculum and hiring practices.

Although Pope (2006) advocated that community colleges should use specific intervention strategies to enhance the academic success of African American male students, he also pointed out that the road to degree completion for Black male community college students is not a smooth one. For instance, Wood and Harris (2012) declare in order for Black male community college students "to progress through the educational pipeline, they must establish, clarify, and reassess their goals in three primary areas: career, personal, and educational" (p. 177). Moreover, research declares the urgency for African American men to achieve "academic success is no longer a pipeline;

it is a lifeline for generations to come” (Hickman, 2008, p. 91). Research suggests that if Black males participate in support programs such as EOF, they are acquiring a lifeline for degree attainment (Schmidt, 2008; Scott-Clayton, 2011; Strayhorn 2008).

Given these points, the conceptual framework for examining the lived experiences of Black males in an EOF program at a community is twofold. First, double consciousness examines the perceptions Black male students have about their experiences at a community college. Second, the responses from the participants identify what successful retention strategies and/or procedures an institution can utilize to increase their persistence.

Since this study focuses on the experiences of Black males in an EOF program at a community college, double consciousness was more beneficial to use than other conceptual frameworks such as feminist perspective, racial discourse, queer theory, and disability inquiry. In a word, utilizing double consciousness as the conceptual framework for this study I was able to discover and describe the positive and negative experience of being a Black male community college student in an EOF program.

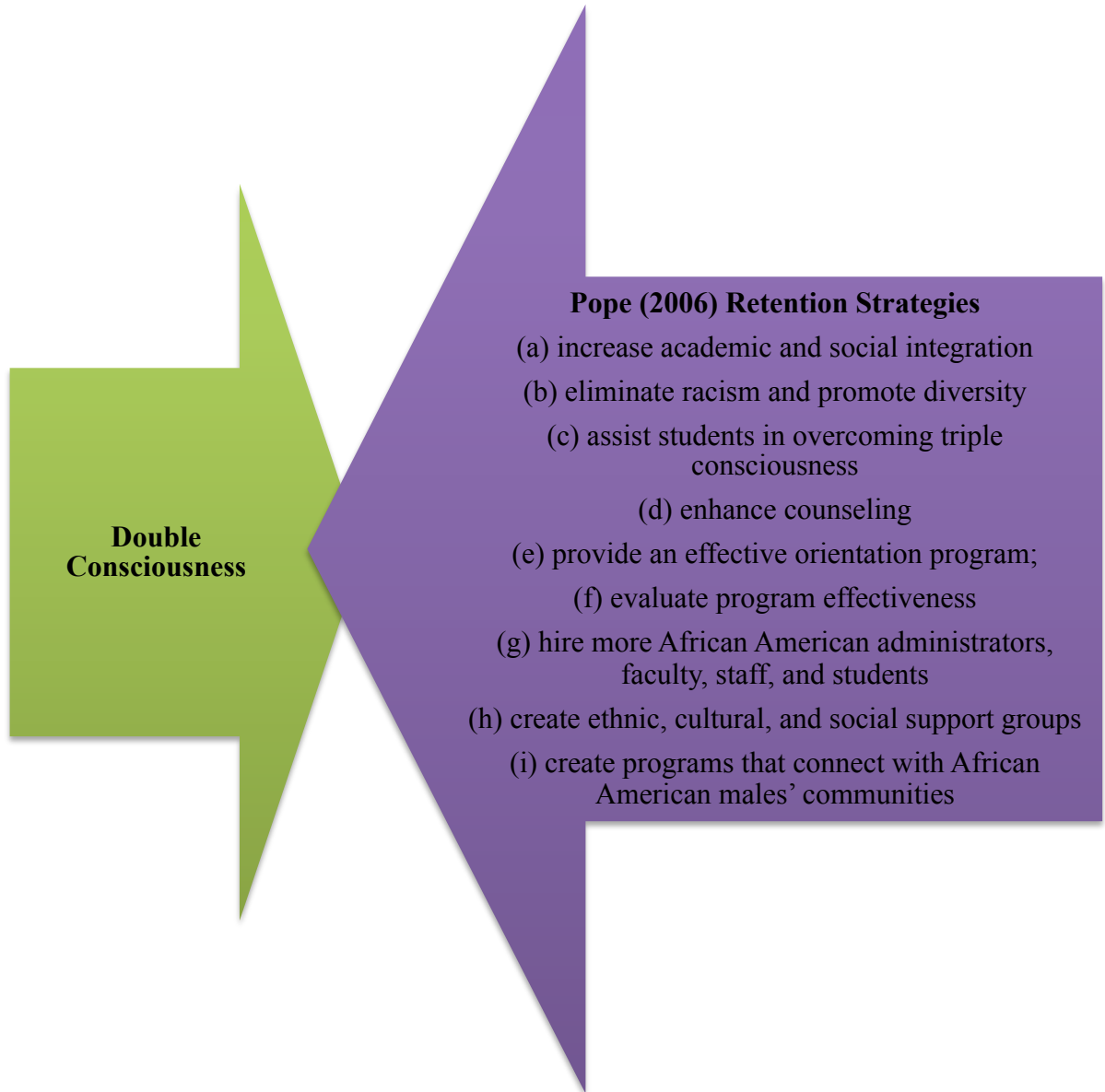


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Data Collection

In order to conduct a phenomenological analysis for this study, I requested and received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Carter Community College (pseudonym) and Rowan University to collect data necessary for this study.

Before gaining approval at Rowan University, I was required to complete an IRB training on social, behavioral and education research. To put it differently, I was trained on how to properly collect data for human subjects.

According to research, a phenomenological analysis describes how an experience occurs and what the participants experienced with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; 2009; Hampton 2002; Smith, 2011; Wood, 2013). The description of this phenomenon pertains to the plight of Black men at a community college, what occurs when Black men enroll in a support program, and what affects Black male students' academic performance. This analysis describes Black male students' self-initiative and support systems because research suggests these factors can encourage them to succeed (Harper, 2009; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Watson, 2006).

Although, some Black male students are able to overcome academic and financial struggles, there are many students who do not attain a college degree because they become conscious of their difficulties and the pressure to succeed (Jackson, 2011; Pope, 2006). As a result, the primary data collection for this study is developed to discover the experiences that can assist Black men at Carter Community College in the EOF program attain a degree. To understand this phenomenon, the data collected for this study consisted of face-to-face interviews. There were 10 participants interviewed and before they were interviewed they completed a research consent form (see Appendix D).

After the consent form was completed, students were interviewed and asked questions that refer to their experience at a community college, in an EOF program, effects of double consciousness, and the impact of structural and cultural factors such as

who and what influences their decisions for pursuing a college degree. According to research, the process for collecting information for a phenomenological study is primarily in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2007). The interviews for this study consisted of 11 questions (see Appendix E), which were scheduled at all three of the college's libraries and recorded on a digital recorder. After the interviews were recorded they were professionally transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. The interviews for this study lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour in length.

The face-to-face interviews and the personal feedback from the participants' experiences provided common trends for rich thick description. According to Creswell (2007), a rich thick description is necessary to make sure that the findings of a study are transferable between the researcher and those being studied. Equally important, to enhance credibility, I chose interviewees who were knowledgeable, whose views were balanced, and who tested my emerging theory (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As a matter of fact, stronger research comes from face-to-face interactions because researchers have a better opportunity to have more authentic responses (Creswell, 2007; 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In face-to-face interviews, researchers are able to make notations about a person's body language, vocal tones, and facial expressions to gather contradictory or overlapping perceptions and nuanced understanding that individuals hold, which makes this study more credible (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Although the interviewees in this study were asked 11 questions, before those questions were asked they were told the purpose of this study to create a friendly environment with participants. The results from these face-to-face interviews used participants' feedback as authentic experiences that provided more insight into the

research questions and the experiences of Black men in higher education. Moreover, the use of face-to-face interviews for data collection is part of the data circle that identifies the experience of Black men at Carter Community College in the EOF program. Consequently, through the use of this data collection strategy, I was able to hear the direct thoughts and perceptions of Black male participants in an EOF program at a community college, how race affects their education experiences, the impact of structural and cultural factors, and what makes them withdraw from or persist at a community college.

To complete the data collection process and to ensure the validity of the research, from the outset I have clarified bias from the study so readers understand my position and assumptions that impact the inquiry. In addition, I provide a rich and thick description that describes in detail the participants' responses to their lived experience as Black males in a EOF program at a community college. Although, there is limited literature about the experiences of Black men in an EOF program at a community college, this study is based on similar research that has been conducted at four-year colleges, support programs, and psychology studies to ensure the idea is grounded and well-supported.

Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2007) there are six practical approaches to use for conducting a phenomenological analysis. In order to conduct a phenomenological analysis, Creswell declares a researcher must apply the following: (a) describe personal experiences with the phenomenon under study; (b) develop a list of significant statements about how individuals are experiencing the topic; (c) develop significant statements about

the topic and then group them into larger units of information; (d) write a description of what the participants in the study experience with the phenomenon using verbatim examples; (e) write a description of how the experience happened; and (f) write a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions (p. 159). Consequently, utilizing these approaches resulted in providing meaningful units of information for themes that described what the participants in the study experienced.

Pursuing this further, in order to discover the personal experiences of Black men at a community college in an EOF program, a researcher should fully describe the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2007). To understand the experiences of Black men at Carter Community College in an EOF program, Creswell (2009) recommends the process of data analysis involve making sense out of text and image data (p. 183). He declares that the data analysis process consists of moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data represented and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data (p. 183). As a result, I matched themes, data, and literature to analyze the findings that described the experience of Black men. For example, I counted specific phrases or “buzzwords” to aid the development of theories that identified consistency and dissimilarity in participants’ responses. After the data was collected, scholarly literature was used to correspond with the responses of Black men at Carter Community College in the EOF program to dissect any differences and similarities that may have appeared in the findings.

Given these points, the analysis for this phenomenological study was conducted from three primary sources of the data collection. According to research, a researcher

engaging in at least two procedures can create validation for a study (Creswell, 2007).

First, I bracketed out my bias from the outset. Second, I included a rich thick description of the finding from this study to fulfill the standards of quality in a qualitative research.

Limitations

This research is limited to the examination of students at one particular community college in New Jersey and the conclusions that are drawn from this study cannot be generalized to all Black men in EOF programs. While there are EOF programs at four-year and two-year colleges, this study is centered on the perceptions and experiences of Black men at a two-year college in an EOF program. In 2012, the New Jersey State of Higher Education reported that 36% (4,431) of the students that enrolled in an EOF program were African Americans. This figure indicates that African Americans are the largest ethnic group to participate in EOF programs. However, the examination of the Black female experiences has been left out of this study because unlike the achievements of Black men, Black female have an increased rate of degree attainment when compared to Black men (NCES, 2014). The information that is articulated in this study is limited to benefit the members that work with this population of Black men, support programs, at community colleges, and Black families.

Summary

Over the years researchers have used various research methods to study the lived experiences of Black men in college. Some scholars have used qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches to research Black men at four-year colleges and two-year colleges (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Cuyjet, 2006; Hickman, 2008; Kimbrough & Harper,

2006; Messer, 2006; Pope, 2006; Watson, 2006; Wood, 2010). They have explored double consciousness, stereotype threat, institutional support, family support, self-awareness, and identified findings that can be helpful for increasing the academic success and degree attainment of Black men in college (Ball, 2010; Bass, 2011; Brown-Ingles, 2003; Bush & Bush, 2010; Dougherty, 2008; Gebru, 2009; Glenn, 2007; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2007; Harper, 2005; 2006; 2009; Harris & Wood, 2013; Harvey, 2002; Mitchell & Means, 2014; Mosby, 2009). Although the experiences of Black men have already been studied, the majority of research has been conducted at four-year colleges. Dabney-Smith (2009) and Wood (2013) point out that research aimed at supporting the success of Black male community college students is needed.

Because the majority of the research on Black men has been conducted at four-year colleges, the methodology for this study focused on Black male students at a community college in a specific support program. This chapter focused on creating a protocol to find the perceptions of a targeted group of Black men to make recommendations about how to reform the plight of Black men in higher education. The method for conducting this study consisted of Black male community college students participating in a face-to-face interview. The use of this data collection circle provided accuracy for identifying and understanding the lived experience, aspirations, reasons, values, and motivation for achieving academic success as a Black male student in an EOF program at a community college. As a result, in the next two chapters, Chapter four analyzes and discusses the data collected from this methodology, as well as key findings, and Chapter five consists of the summary of findings, and recommendations for further research that should be covered.

Chapter Four

Discussion of Findings

The plight of African American males enrolled in community college is well documented (Bush & Bush, 2004; Flowers, 2006; Pope, 2006; Wood, 2012). Although research indicates the degree completion of Black males in community college is below the national average (NCES, 2015), this study examined the lived experience of Black males in an Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program at a community college in New Jersey. With this in mind, research has described the position of African American men in community colleges as a very important juncture of the educational pipeline (Bush, Bush, & Wilcoxson, 2009). In particular, Pope (2006) declares, “for many African American men, the community college serves as the sole opportunity for access to higher education” (p. 210). Other scholars identify community college as a “viable postsecondary alternative” and suggest it represents the first and last effort for Black men to secure economic, political, and social mobility (Bush, 2004; Levin, 2008; Wood, 2013; Wood & Harrison, 2014). Besides scholars recognizing the significance of community colleges for African American men, they also revealed the plight of Black men in community colleges has been understudied, under theorized, and overlooked by educators, reformers, and policy makers working in and near the community college system (Bush, Bush, & Wilcoxson, 2009).

For this reason, the purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the findings extracted from face-to-face and follow-up interviews of 10 Black male students in an EOF program at a community college. This chapter describes five themes and three sub-themes that capture the essence of their lived experience in an EOF program at a

community college. The five prominent themes that emerged from the study were: (a) the EOF program provides a supportive atmosphere; (b) family and peer influence; (c) community college is a stepping stone; (d) being a Black male and a community college student; and (e) persistence: the fight to stay focused.

Although there were five themes that emerged, there were two sub-themes that emerged and provided unexpected results in the “EOF provides a supportive atmosphere”: Strong connection to advisors, and academic and social integration. Under the fourth theme, being a Black and a community college student, there is a sub-theme that points out Black males felt a sense of twoness by experiencing double consciousness. In addition to these themes, research and significant statements that illustrate Black males perceptions about participating in an EOF program and attending a community college support findings in this study. The following section of this study provides a brief narrative of the Black male community college students that participated in and Educational Opportunity Fund program.

Narratives of Black Males in EOF

In 1997, Wellbrock found that the process for Black male students in the New Jersey community college system to graduate is complex. Wellbrock argued that getting to graduation is not as simple as attending classes and studying. He specified Black male students must concurrently deal with intellect, have a sense of being and emotion, social skills, and preparation. Although Wellbrock’s findings are almost two decades old, findings from this study suggest circumstances still have not changed. Moreover, this study shares stories of 10 Black males participating in a support program designed to help them succeed.

Carmelo:

According to Carmelo, he was not supposed to be attending a community college and participating in an EOF program. His intentions were to attend a four-year university to play football and make his family proud. Unfortunately, Carmelo's dream was deferred when he decided to stay at home and attend Carter Community College after learning that his grandmother was ill and had six months to live. Carmelo shared:

The doctor told me my grandmother had six months to a year to live, so I wanted to stay here and take care of her, because she's been taking care of me my whole 19 years living...and because I know about exercise science, physical therapy, and nutrition, my grandmother trusted me to work with the nurses and the physical therapists, going in and out of the house. I checked her blood pressure, and made sure she ate the right foods and wasn't nothing crazy entering her bloodstream or anything like that.

So after she passed away from Type-2 diabetes is when I made decision to go to college and get into the EOF program. I wasn't really feeling it the first day, because, I was just thinking about what happened over the summer, but after the two day EOF orientation, I actually got the chance to interact with all the EOF advisors, and they made me [feel] at home, even though I still had this troubles [sic] back home, they made me feel like family here, and I would do anything to just stay in EOF and make sure I can contribute to EOF the best way I can.

Gary:

Gary who is an automotive student expressed that his experiences in EOF have kind of changed him since he became a college student. Gary asserted:

I was always into procrastinating when I received all my schoolwork, and it was actually one of my friends that got me to join EOF. I really didn't know what the program was about at first but if I didn't join EOF, I don't know where I would be at this point right now. I probably would of dropped out, or probably been somewhere struggling to get ahead with my education. They help me correct papers so teachers can see the improvements on the work I did. And sometimes when I just struggle to write, this program helps me out.

Izzy:

Similarly, Izzy who is a traditional student indicated that he is satisfied with his experience as a first-year EOF student and as a college student. According to Izzy:

I just came out of high school last year and [Carter Community College] wasn't my first choice, but it ended up being the right choice for me in the end. So, as far as my experience in the program, it has been a good thing because I like the benefits that are coming out of it. Especially being in the EOF program, the peer tutors, and having advisors guide you to your path to success.

Jay:

Jay who felt he had nowhere to go after high school described his experience in EOF and stated:

When I first came to school, it was a little a scary; I wasn't too sure about what I was getting myself into. College wasn't something that I thought about. But after

getting to meet with some of the advisors and getting introduced to the EOF program, I gave it a chance. I got to know my advisor well and he made me write out an educational plan. I got my schedule ready for first semester, I attended my courses, and I transitioned in smoothly and I just went with it. As an EOF student, I think it's very important that I even got into the program because they've helped me so much. They have helped me with my courses and with support for the stuff I never understood. I just went to them and they helped me out. They gave me guidance basically. And with EOF, I had many opportunities open up for me as well. I got a job on campus; they helped me out with that. I got to speak to the president and was invited to speak at the [college's] gala.

Malik:

As the oldest participant in this study, Malik shared “EOF helps out”. He pointed out that the program “helps you get like an extra foot in the door to your career path. EOF is good because it is just a helpful and useful resource for college. I have used it for tutoring a couple of times”.

Marcus:

Marcus, who is a transfer student from a four-year public university, expressed his experience with the program was pleasant but he was unhappy with the financial aid he received. He commented:

I mean everybody's nice. But, as far as aid it's a bit at the minimal level. Me personally, I've always been a student that tries to take care of business. I currently hold a GPA of 3.89. But ever since I joined EOF, I feel its been very

demanding in terms of like activities you have to do and hours you have to put in. And, I feel like all of that was supposed to help you improve in schooling. But, if you are improving or doing well already, it's kind of pointless to an extent.

A lot of the micromanaging is hard to deal with at times because we all have responsibilities to take care of and they [EOF] are demanding something else from you that you can't really do at the time. A person like me, I have to depend on other people to get to school. I can't just, magically show up at certain times. I try my best, to do everything but it's like every time you miss one thing, that could decide whether you get [financial] aid or not. I'm an out of county [student] too so I have to pay out of [my] pocket. I've been paying out of pocket and I expected EOF to really help. That's the whole reason I left [Truckers] University to come to [Carter] Community College and join EOF. But so far with [financial] aid, I only got \$100. And to make matters worse, I was hearing through the grapevine, there were students that didn't take care of their business and they were getting the full amount of [financial] aid.... So, it was very confusing because I have received only \$100 my whole time participating in EOF. And, what has helped me the most besides depending on my parents this particular semester is a [CCC] scholarship. A guy just called and told me, they wanted to give me another scholarship so I was pretty excited about that.

Mike:

Mike, who has a 4.0 GPA, emphasized that, “being in the EOF program has been very, very good. I’ve become closer to my advisor and he has just been helping me

through the college experience”. Mike voiced his advisor Mr. [Singer] and the program are:

Helping guide me through classes, help me fix my schedule to make sure it suits me because I am looking to transfer to another college after I graduate from here. The program has just helped me in this process and also make things fun with different activities. Not only fun, but also educational as well. All the advisors, even the other advisors in EOF have helped me despite the fact that they are not my real advisor. So, overall I would say the EOF office is very motivating group and they look to provide you with a good experience while in college.

Omarion:

Marcus’s older brother, Omarion, explained that his experience at a community college in an EOF program was different than when he attended a private four-year university.

Before, I can even tell you about my experience at the community college. My first school of choice was [Steven Hill] University. So, that's where I went for two years before I came to [Carter] Community College. And [Steven Hill] was my number one choice, and I got in, and not only did I get into [Steven Hill], but I got into the Pre-med/Pre-dental Plus Program. Mr. [Singer] was actually a part of that program. He graduated from that program, and it was a pre-med program for students who wanted to become medical professionals. We were a part of EOF, but me being in that program, I wasn't really introduced into the EOF community, but I was more into or stuck with the pre-med community. So it wasn't a lot of

people that looked like me in that area. I was the only Black male of my class to get into the program at that time. And the only other Black male, from what I could remember in the program was Mr. [Singer], and then he graduated. And then I was the last one left until the new class came in, and then there was one more Black male. But that whole experience, I was really depressed and I had a lot of things going. I had a son, and when he was born I started measuring out my options. I remember my funding was revoked for some reason because I didn't fulfill all my requirements in some way, shape, or form. And I was told I could stay [at Stevens Hill] if I just did what I had to do but I knew my heart wasn't in it anymore because I was depressed. It was like the moment, the words, I'm from Newark came out of my mouth, everybody started treating me different. And it's been like that for a long time.

According to Omarion, being the only Black male in the program took a toll on him. He even mentioned how other Black males on campus noticed the effect when he discussed how his transition to a community college was smooth. Omarion stated:

So like right now if you ask me who my friends are from [Steven Hill], it would be a few Sigma's, like maybe two Omega's and then a couple Alpha's, they're all black fraternities. So the Sigma's, they just held it down for me. They helped me out through like my whole college experience so far this year. And it happened just because of one of them met me, his name is [Tahj Goods]. He just saw me, and he kind of took me in, and just talked to me, and figured out what was going on. So they actually looked out for me and they still look out for me to this day. I check in with them, they check in on me sometimes. So it's funny how having

your people there helps out a lot. So when I got here [CCC] I was introduced to EOF community more, and it wasn't just, all the STEM majors and everything. I saw everybody, and then I saw more people that looked like me, and it made the transition much more smooth. It was a lot different from Steven Hill because there were more people like me. And I feel like it wasn't the fact that they looked like me, it was the fact that they understood me, and they didn't feel like they needed to treat me differently because of what I looked like, or where I was from. I want to say it wasn't what I looked like that made me different from the pre-med students it was more so where I was from.

Teddy:

Teddy, who is a second-semester student not only at the community college and in EOF but also in the English as a Second Language program (ESL), expressed that the EOF program is “not too bad and it’s alright because I have excellent grades. I think the classes that I take are a little easy because when I get something easy I get really lazy. I like things when they are hard”. Teddy explained he enrolled in college because:

I want to become a civil engineer and build bridges, buildings, and all of that.

When I came to America, I found out the best way to do this was to go to college and learn more about it. Also, I really didn’t have anything else to do and my parents left me with no choice.

Zay:

On the other hand, Zay described his experience in EOF and stated:

Basically starting off I was the shy type of guy and you know, being in EOF it actually helped me out to just open up more and actually show my true potential and so far it's [the program] been working out fine for me.

In a word, the experience of Black males participating in an EOF program can be described as beneficial. The brief narratives of participants in this study provided a description of the Black male students that participated in this study. Generally speaking, participants suggested EOF is a supportive resource available to them during their academic pursuits and a place where they learn, socialize, and excel in a welcoming environment. The next section of this study presents a discussion of all the themes and factors that influence their success.

Theme 1 - Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) Program Provides a Supportive Atmosphere

In the state of New Jersey, the Educational Opportunity Fund's (EOF) mission is to "provide support for educational initiatives, support services, and leadership activities that assist students to improve their chance of success" (New Jersey Commission of Higher Education, 2010). Although participants for this study have identified several reasons why they attend a community college, they all identified the support from the EOF program as extremely helpful. Participants described services such as tutoring, mentoring, and funding as not only important but also beneficial. In addition, they viewed the personal attention and special programs EOF provided as supportive. For example Mike shared:

EOF has helped me well in college. They are different than my advisors in high school. The advisors in high school were good but they didn't really know me by name. They just saw me once, twice, or three times a year and that was about it. Here, I feel free to come up to any of the advisors anytime I want to talk to them about my classes or any personal problems I may also have.

Zay indicated when the program is utilized properly, it definitely helps your academic performance. He commented:

Coming to visit an advisor and really taking the time to talk to them whether it's based on personal or academic information, they can actually help you and see what you are actually failing and what can they do to help you perform better in school.

As previously noted, Izzy stated:

My experience at a community college has been a good thing because I like the benefits that are coming out of it, especially being in the EOF Program. I appreciate having peer tutors and having advisors to guide you on your path to success.

In a like manner, Omarion who voiced that he had a disheartening experience at [Steven Hill] University (which was his number one choice) shared that EOF provides valuable resources. Omarion explained:

The EOF program has provided a lot of resources. And even though sometimes it could be annoying when you've have to come back here to do this and to do that,

at the end of the day the program prepares you for the future. Like I remember they [the advisors] just hit us out of nowhere with this assignment to start filling out job applications and submitting resumes. I appreciated it, even though it's annoying. I can appreciate it because I understand that what they are doing. They are giving foresight for the future.

Even though Omarion commented EOF is helping his future, Carmelo's experience was different. During Carmelo's interview, he shared that he enrolled in the EOF program after the death of his grandmother and he "wasn't really feeling it." However, after attending a two-day summer orientation and meeting more students in the fall semester, he commented:

I actually got the chance to interact with all the EOF advisors, and they made me [feel] at home, even though I still had this troubles [sic] back home, they made me feel like family here, and I would do anything to just stay in EOF.

Carmelo's passion for the program is a representation of how all the participants feel about EOF. In addition to participants appreciating EOF's assistance transitioning to college, tutoring services, and fulfilling extended family roles, participants also praised the support program for helping their overall development. For instance, Zay previously expressed that EOF has helped him open up to show his potential. He shared:

First starting off I was the shy type of guy and you know, being in EOF, it actually helped me out, like, just to open up more. Actually [to] show my true potential and so far it's [the program] been working out fine.

Generally speaking, participants consider the EOF program is helpful because it provides a place of comfort. In particular, Teddy shared that “people are very comfortable to talk with and someone is always there to help you. In fact, when asked about his advisor, Teddy enthusiastically mentioned he loves him and he is very good.

Strong connection to advisors. According to research, a small number of community colleges are providing African American males with mentors, diverse programming, or customized curriculum to meet their needs (Bass, 2011). Findings from this study suggest Black male students participating in EOF expressed they are comfortable in the program. Most compelling evidence suggests Black male students are comfortable in the program and at the community college because of their advisor. For example, Zay stated:

The tutoring hours, the tutors that are there helped me out in my subjects, and all the stuff that I didn't get. Basically, the people that are there like my advisor are more likely to help me and without my advisor I wouldn't be where I'm at now.

In addition, Omarion discussed how a simple act by his advisor made a significant impact on him. He told the story about coming to school to register for courses and “my little boy was running around and just making noise. It was my EOF counselor playing with him and attending to my child while I try to make stuff happen”.

Another example of how an advisor was supportive is when Jay shared how he was unsure of what major to pursue as a student. According to Jay:

When I first started here, I was a nursing major. Nursing really wasn't something that I had passion for. I spoke to one of the EOF advisors, mine in particular, and he said 'if you want to leave here on time', because I never knew nursing was actually like a semester for each clinical. He said if you want to leave here on time, and you want to go into whatever you want to do. He suggested liberal studies. So we sat down, we set up the educational plan and I was on my way. And as opposed to the regular advisors there...when you go in and you see a regular advisor, they give you information. When you see another, they give you something different. With EOF it is always consistent. This is what you're supposed to do and this is what you're not supposed to do. They also helped me because whenever I had summer classes, they offered to pay for it.

Given these points, it seems like the underpinnings of student responses suggest Black males have a special connection and trust with their advisors in the EOF program. According to research, it is clear why Black males in this study would follow the guidance of their advisors and appreciate the support the program offers (Wood, 2014). Wood suggests Black males "receive messages from their family and friends that shape their perception of the role men should have in a school context" (p. 789). With this in mind, the presence of African American male advisors consciously or unconsciously provides students with a sense of belonging (Bass, 2011; Dubois, 1903; Harper, 2009; Jordan, 2008; Pope, 2006; Steele, 1997; 1999; Smith, 2010; Wood, 2010; 2013). This implication emerged because surprisingly, all of the participants in this study had an African American male advisor and were able to divulge that the program provides a family like atmosphere that is extremely helpful to their development. Black males in this

study are following the advice of their advisors in the school setting because they considered them as a family member, friend, mentor, or someone they cannot do without.

Academic and social integration. Another key point often overlooked, is the academic and social integration EOF provides. According to research, Black males at two-year colleges have lower academic and social integration than their four-year counterparts (Flowers, 2006; Wood, 2014). Surprisingly, the analysis of this study suggest when Black males participate in an EOF program, their academic and social integration improves. For instance, Jay described his academic and social integration experience in EOF as “pretty good”. He emphasized:

I met a lot of really good people, friends, and the professors are pretty good. We have a few that are, you know, have their ups and downs but, I’m not worried about that. Like I said, everyone I know here is a support group for me. They’ve helped with the class work, and whatever else [I need]. I have resources here. I’m EOF so, I have access to the tutoring room and I’m also a tutor now. I love it. They offered me a job as a tutor and I tutor psychology and a little bit of English. So yeah, my perspective overall? It’s been pretty good so far.

In addition to receiving support and gaining employment, Jay described the social aspect of the program as a place that offers guidance. He explained:

When I first came to school, I wasn’t too sure about what I was getting myself into. College wasn’t something that I thought about. But after meeting some of the advisors, and getting introduced to the EOF program, I gave it a chance. I got

to know my advisor well. He made me write out an educational plan. I got my schedule ready for the first semester. I attended my courses and I transitioned in slowly, and I just went with it. As an EOF student, I think it's very important that I even got into the program because they have helped me so much. They helped me with my courses, with support, and when it came to stuff like I never understood, I just went to them, and they helped me out. They gave me guidance basically.

Moreover, Jay's participation in EOF was so engaging that he became a representative for the program and Black students. Jay asserted:

With EOF many opportunities opened for me as well. I got a job on campus; they helped me out with that. I got to speak to the president. I was also invited to speak at the gala.... The gala's like a formal party thing. It's really important. It's a really good party. It was with the president, some of the faculty members, some of the donors, they were there and we were just there talking about the school... The president was talking to them about donating money to the school.... I was actually one of the guest speakers there, too. I went up, I spoke about my experience at [Carter Community College] and how I stay focused on my studies as opposed to other African Americans and how I'm, graduating on time and everything, and that's basically it.

According to research, group-specific services such as an EOF program have the complex job of understanding various student cultures (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Their goal is to retain underrepresented student populations, and encourage students to

take advantage of services such as registration, mandatory counseling sessions, tutoring, and peer advising (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Participants for this study suggested receiving support from an EOF program provides a comfortable environment for their development. For instance, Mike revealed that besides his family, EOF advisors have motivated him to excel by being the best student possible. Another student named Izzy identified EOF's requirement to complete four hours of study hall a week with a tutor as a benefit he uses to his advantage. In addition, he enjoys the fact that as an EOF student, he receives personal attention. Izzy pointed out:

As an EOF student, you can just go straight in and talk to your advisor. Whereas, if you're [sic] aren't an EOF student, you couldn't have that opportunity. So, I like the fact that I can just go to my advisor and talk to them about my concerns. Marcus, who is a transfer student from a four-year public research institution mentioned he was able to receive an additional scholarship because an EOF advisor notified him of the opportunity. In addition, he expressed his satisfaction participating in the program and attending a community college when he divulged, "I don't see the difference in a lot of the curriculums, in here, like compared to a public college like [Lauryn University] or something".

On the other hand, Marcus' older brother, Omarion not only acknowledged that he had a peaceful transition transferring from a four-year to a two-year college but also shared that his experience at the community college provided him the opportunity to better understand his schoolwork. As matter of fact, he declared the academic rigor at a community college is "exactly the same" as a four-year university and explained:

Leaving [Steven Hill] and coming to county [college], a lot of people looked at me like, so he messed up his opportunity, and that's it [for him]. But it's funny because when I left [Steven Hill] and I came here, all my grades were like crazy good...I started off as a 4.0 student, and I'm doing it. Right now it's looking like straight B's, that's just because of the struggle with sciences and everything. And I've been sacrificing a lot of sleep, but at the end of the day I'm still doing way better than I was at [Steven Hill].I can honestly say that the work isn't different. The work is exactly the same, but here I'm getting it ... At [Steven Hill] I got a B in chemistry. Here, it's looking like I could definitely get a B, or if I push harder I could get an A in chemistry, but I understand why I'm getting that B, or that A, you get it? It's, like at [Steven Hill] I know I took chemistry, I know I've been through it, and I know I passed, but I didn't understand why, you get it? I didn't know what was really going on in the class, but I somehow got the grade, you know?

In addition to participants revealing EOF provides comfort, students also believe the program enforces student engagement. According to research, when African American men enroll in college they are the least likely to be engaged on campus (Dabney-Smith, 2009). Research suggests a major challenge for Black male community college students is to participate in activities (Pope, 2006). However, this study found the impetus of an EOF program initiates student engagement among Black males. For example, during the interview process, Omarion excitedly expressed "I am getting paid to tutor, and when I tutor somebody, I actually learn the stuff that I already know". His experience as a tutor also provides a connection amongst his classmates. For instance, he

articulated his gratification as a tutor when he shared, “I know I always have someone to talk to because I am never alone”.

Similarly, Teddy believes his satisfaction with EOF enabled him to venture out of his comfort zone and utilize other departments such as the Academic Learning Center (ALC). Teddy indicated he mostly uses the ALC for math even though he does not have a problem with mathematics. According to Teddy, he visits the center when “some problems give me some trouble” because “it’s nice, people are very comfortable to talk with,” and “someone is always there to explain and help”.

Overall, participants suggested an EOF program provides influential advisors, offers a place of comfort, and encourages student engagement. Given that all of the participants for this study voiced they had an African American male EOF advisor, this study also found Black male students were conscious about race and felt the support they received was an extension of their family.

Theme 2 - Family and Peer Influence

According to research, the socioeconomic attainment and attrition of Black male students at a community college is greatly influenced by family and friends (Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2007). Researchers highlight that family socioeconomic status has great emphasis on Black males’ integration into college and college completion (Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2012; Mosby, 2009; Pope, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012). Scholars point out Black families can either influence Black male students to give up or persist in attaining a college degree (Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2012; Mosby, 2009; Pope, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012). Pursuing this further, researchers

identified that healthy familial support such as positive attitudes and encouragement can play a major role in the academic success of Black male students (Harper, 2009; Mosby, 2009). As a matter of fact, Bonner and Bailey (2006) asserted the familial network is a frontline defense unit to assist students in strategically moving through the postsecondary minefield.

Examining the experience of Black males at a community college in EOF has revealed that the decision to pursue an education is not a decision Black males make on their own. Participants indicated that their matriculation to pursue a college degree was either encouraged or motivated by their family. In particular, Gary enrolled at a community college and in an EOF program because:

I took it really upon myself to attend, to try to get somewhere else. Most of my friends stayed at home and they didn't go to college. Honestly, that's their opinion not to go to college, not to go back to school. But I'm not going to waste my time. I just graduated and went straight to college. I'm not trying to waste no time or let time fly by. Really my aunt is the one that said I should go to college just to further my education, because it could better me in life and I just took her word upon that.

Jay enrolled in college because his parents influenced him. According to Jay, he considered joining the military but his parents were not supportive of that decision. He commented:

Honestly, college wasn't something I was really interested in. The reason why I went to college was because I had nowhere else to go. I thought about the military, but then I was like nah, my parents were not for it. My mom was like, I don't want you going to war. Because in their mind, they think if you go to the military, you are going to be in the war. And I didn't want to hear that, so I was like, you know what, forget it. I got accepted to a few schools then I decided, you know what, let me just try college. I had gotten accepted, but then I spoke to some of the advisors over there about the financial situation and how we can get that situated. From what they told me, it wasn't going to work out. They said that my first year, if I had went to the college, I would have been covered. But from there on I would have to take out loans.

Although Jay acknowledged his parents influenced him to attend college, he also acknowledged a peer influenced his decision as well. He revealed that he was against attending a community college and stated:

So one of my friends actually, I think [Gary] was coming here and he told me about [CCC]. He said, you know what bro, 'it's the best option because its cheap, financial aid will cover you, and it's the only way to go'. So I was like, you know what, let me give it a try. But at first, I was like no. Because in my mind, even in high school, I promised myself I would never go to a community college.

By the same token, Izzy revealed he was hesitant to matriculate at a community college because, "I thought coming into a community college is not like a four-year college. I just thought it [community college] wasn't as good as it is supposed to be". Izzy

pointed out his parents and friends influenced his decision and gave him more confidence to enroll. He stated:

Well of course my parents have influenced me a lot 'cause, they wanted me to become successful. I knew that they wanted me to achieve and ...their influence was what pushed me to go to [CCC] instead of [Ronald University]. So, I felt a little bit confident with their decision to back me up. As for friends, they were kind of surprised that I switched my schools. But they understood and some of them have come back to me or texted me to say, “you made a better choice than I did. That, I'd rather be going to school for free instead of paying like, thousands and thousands of dollars”.

Not only did Izzy acknowledge that his parents and friends influenced his enrollment but also he noted that choosing to attend a community college was ultimately his responsibility. Izzy declared, “aside from my parents wanting me to be successful, I knew that I wanted to be successful too. And I knew that one way I would have to do it is through college, and I just felt like, okay, if I get through college then that will help me become what I want to become”.

As the oldest student in the study, Malik enrolled at a community college because his mother wanted him to attend college. According to Malik:

When I first graduated high school my mother wanted me to go to college because she wanted me to actually be the first one in my family to go to college... she just

wants me to get a degree. She doesn't want me to not have a degree. She figures even if I don't use my degree, I will always have something to fall back on.

In the same way Malik's mother influenced him to enroll in college, two participants that are brothers (Marcus and Omarion) noted their mother influenced their pursuit of a college degree. However, despite growing up in the same household the brothers have different narratives on how their mother influenced their enrollment. According to Marcus, going to college was expected because his mother is a college graduate. He noted:

I mean, [attending college] it was expected, I guess. Yeah, it was expected. I just wanted to make sure I was doing something to better myself...I want to say, it just felt like everybody was telling me [to go to college because] you can't just do nothing. Like, you've got to do something. If you want to work. But, like, my mom, she went to college. She did all of that [academic] stuff too. So, she wanted me to do it too, I guess...You know, my mother's from Ghana originally and she'll put it like this, if she can do it, like, ain't no reason I cannot do it and I was born here.

On the other hand, Marcus' older brother, Omarion, declared his mother influenced his decision to attend college when she bought him a toy medical kit. According to Omarion:

My mom bought me a toy. She bought me a toy like when I was so young, I can remember this day like it was yesterday. It was a toy medical kit and every time somebody asked me why did you want to be a doctor, it's because of that. When

she bought me that, I remember how much fun I was having with that thing. She literally picked me up from our babysitters, me and my brother, my mom was a single parent. At the time we lived in North Newark near the Pavilion. We lived there in an apartment on the 4th floor at the time, and it was like a studio apartment. When I got in the apartment she showed it to me and then I just stayed up that night just playing with it. So that always told me, this is what I want to be, I enjoyed that toy so much I knew I wanted to be a doctor. And then I just grew up knowing that if I want to do this, I have to go to college. College is not like one of those things that I need to go to college to get a job. It's more like okay, college just has to happen so I can get to med school to get a job.

As a majority of the participants pointed out that their parents and friends influenced their enrollment, Zay emphasized his grandparents influenced him. During his interview, Zay expressed:

My grandparents who I take as my parents motivated me to go to college. I mean, it's a long story. Basically, they've been telling me that I have the intelligence to become a college person. And, that started when I was going to high school. They would say, 'You know, you should go to college, I think you'd be like a great fit, you would do very well in college.'

All things considered, the participants in this study were influenced to enroll in a community college by their family and peers. They were encouraged to matriculate at a community college to establish themselves academically and financially. Their enrollment allowed them to make their family proud, avoid combat, and have an

opportunity for growth after high school. That is to say, when Black males pursue a postsecondary education at a community college, they treat it as a stepping stone.

Theme 3 - Community College as a Stepping Stone

As noted previously, African American males enroll in community colleges because of their open access, affordability, close proximity, and ability to provide upward mobility (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Ingram, Williams, Coaxum, Hilton, & Harrell, 2016; Pope, 2006; Wood & Harrison, 2014). Although community colleges have been praised for their open access, they have also faced major criticism (Bush, Bush, Wilcoxson, 2009; Clark, 1960; 1980; Cohen, 1980; Johnston, 1980; Neumann & Riesman, 1980; Wood, 2013; Wood, Hilton, & Hicks, 2014; Wood, Palmer, & Harris, 2015; Vaughan, 1980). Research suggests community colleges have a certain stigma that reveals they are underprepared for underprepared students (Barr & Schuetz, 2008; McGrath & Tobia, 2008; Shurgart & Romano, 2008). Researchers point out that community colleges have marginalized students and their marginalization is a “pernicious problem” that manifests in individual actions, institutional policies, and social practices (Deli-Amen, 2011; Harbour & Ebie, 2011). For instance, many students come to community colleges hoping and expecting to live and study in a more diverse environment free from marginalization, but too often find their expectations are not fulfilled (Harbour & Ebie, 2011). Surprisingly, many of the expectations are not fulfilled because the United States’ hierarchical system of higher education places community colleges at the bottom (Clark, 1960; 1980; Cohen, 1980; Johnston, 1980; Neumann & Riesman, 1980; Vaughan, 1980). For this reason Vaughan (1980) declares, “the great majority of students who attend community colleges are doomed to remain near the

bottom” (p. 2). Research indicates, community colleges cool out students by encouraging them to lower their aspirations from professional degrees to settling for career curriculums that tend to lead to dead-end positions which do not contribute to students’ upward social mobility (Clark, 1960; 1980; Cohen, 1980; Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Pope, 2006; Vaughan, 1980).

Given these points, participants in this study illustrated that they felt a peculiar sensation enrolling at a community college. Revisiting previous comments by participants such as Carmelo, Jay, Izzy, Marcus, and Omarion implied that there is a stigma of being a community college student. For example, Carmelo indicated attending a community college involves having to disprove stereotypes. He revealed that as a community college student, “it feels like everyone keeps beating down on you and talking about you. I know you shouldn’t be paying them any attention, [but] when I do listen to it that’s when I start to get discouraged”.

Jay emphasized, “I promised myself I would never get into community college...because I listen to people too much. They tell me, you know if you go to county college, because it's not all that. [A] two-year school, [people] don't think highly of it.” By the same token, Izzy was hesitant to attend a community college because he also thought they were not “as good as it is supposed to be”. Marcus argued that there is “no difference in the curriculums” between a community college and a four-year institution. Marcus’ brother, Omarion declared, “I can honestly say that the work isn’t different. The work is exactly the same.” Nevertheless, research points out that there is a difference in the level of instruction (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014).

Findings for this study support research indicating African American male students perceive community colleges as a major juncture in their educational pipeline (Bazile, 2009; Bush & Bush, 2010; Bush, Bush, & Wilcoxson, 2009; Mosby, 2009; Strayhorn, 2012; Wood, Hilton, & Hicks, 2014; Wood, Palmer, & Harris, 2015). In fact, participants revealed that a community college is a stepping stone to either pursuing additional postsecondary advancement or a career. In other words, Black male community college students in EOF pursuing a college degree use the institution as a platform for their advancement.

Gary commented:

After high school, I was going to further my education. I didn't want to stay at home and just let my life wash away. Because if I just sat home, I would have been missing a year or two of college, and I would have to go back and start remembering everything I had learned in high school to go on to college. And then I didn't want this opportunity for education to go to waste, so I probably just get a degree or get something, to start working out in the real world. Because I really can't get a job without a diploma or a certain degree that says you went to college did this and studied in this major, so you can show you have experience. If I would have stayed at home, not gone to college, I wouldn't be able to start a career in what I'm doing.

As far as pursuing a career, Malik revealed he enrolled in college because he wants independence. Malik shared:

Honestly, after I graduated high school, my mother wanted me to go to college. She wants me to be the first one to actually go to college. She just wants me to get a degree. She does not want me to not have a degree because she figures if I have a degree I will at least have something to always fall back on. And like seeing my friends going through different paths in life, like the ones who work all of the time, they're not happy. So, I rather go to school and work later to be happy doing what I want to do...But working full-time on a 9 to 5 manual labor, I am not doing that anymore.

Omarion who plans to become a doctor pointed out:

I just grew up knowing that if I want to do this [become a doctor] I gotta do this [enroll in college]. College is not like one of those things that, I need to attend to get a job. It's more like, okay, college just has to happen so I can get to med school to get a job. It's a stepping stone.

In spite of participants acknowledging they attended a community college for an opportunity to advance, they also enrolled at a community college hoping their experience enhances their confidence and personal development. In particular, Jay indicated his matriculation at a community college was a wise decision because he had “nowhere else to go”. He revealed that attending a community college was his best option because he could not afford to attend a four-year institution or join the military.

On the other hand, Zay planned to join the National Guard and take a few semesters off from school. He explained, “I mean basically, I am just taking whatever I

gain from here and take it as far as I can in the military. I know I will be able to adapt quicker because of my experiences here”.

Consequently, all of the participants shared that they view community college not only as a place to train for a career but a place that provides them time to figure out their future. With this in mind, findings for this study indicated that participants are hopeful attaining a college degree secures them with an opportunity for advancement and makes their families proud. Under those circumstances, the participation of Black males at a community college in a support program such as EOF is an additional attempt to find support to secure their intentions.

Theme 4 – Being a Black Male and a Community College Student

In 2015, the National Center for Education Statistics reported the 2010 cohort of first-time, full-time Black male degree-seeking students at two-year postsecondary institutions had a graduation rate of 19% after three years. In spite of some Black male students achieving success, their graduation rate was below the national average of 26% for the two-year higher education sector. After examining Black males at a community college in an EOF program, findings suggested Black male students have to overcome discrimination and negative stereotypes to achieve success.

A sense of twoness. According to research, the vast majority of Black males in a community college experience being negatively stereotyped in education (Wood & Hilton, 2012). Scholars found Black males believe that their faculty and peers view them as academically unqualified (Cose, 2002; 2011; Dabney-Smith, 2009; Delgado, 1995;

Hickman, 2008; Johnson, 1993; Jordan, 2008; Kunjufu, 1986; 1989; Pope, 2006; Wood, 2012). Other researchers point out Black males are perceived to have improper guidance, low social status, and poor academic preparation (Bush, Bush, & Wilcoxson, 2009; Harper, 2012; Pope, 2006; Reynolds, 2010; Wood, 2012; Wood & Hilton, 2012). All things considered, this research found Black males in EOF at a community college experience double consciousness.

In 1903, Dubois defined the term double consciousness as the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (p. 9). It is two warring ideals in one body persistent from being torn asunder (Dubois, 1903). According to research, “double consciousness keeps most African American males from actively participating in the educational pipeline” (Hickman, 2008, p. 23). As a matter of fact, research asserts that double consciousness forces African Americans to view themselves as a negated group and a self-defined group within the broader context of American democracy and racism (Black, 2012). In other words, double consciousness is the understanding of one’s race within one’s environment, as well as the understanding of exterior environments (Hickman, 2008). With that said, participants for this study articulated they felt a sense of twoness. For example, Omarion discussed a video he watched in class with a Black male giving a commencement speech and commented:

I’m doing this college success class, and they made us watch this video, and I see a Black male and he’s crying. You know, he’s proud of himself, and I don’t wanna take that away from him, but our professor wanted us to share how we felt. And I didn’t feel like I could really, truly share how I felt because everybody was,

you know, speaking highly of this man that looks like me.... And it's like he's doing what he's supposed to do, you know.... And his story doesn't sound that different from mine. But it's like I have to ask myself, what is he doing now after this?

Omarion's comments exposed his skepticism not only for higher education but also his questioning why Black males receive so much praise in society for attaining a college degree. In other words, Omarion believes attaining a degree is a prerequisite for achieving success and should never be viewed as the final result. While continuing to comment on the video, Omarion stated:

But it's like it's hard for me to say I'm proud of this young man. I am proud of him because, you know, it's a good achievement to make, and it's a stepping stone. But I don't want it to be celebrated like it doesn't usually happen.

That is to say, Black men should be proud of their achievements but should never view themselves or be viewed by society as an anomaly because of their accomplishment.

As an illustration, participants in this study told stories that indicate they experienced double consciousness. They felt the peculiar sensation of being a Black student and a community college student. In fact, participants indicated the effect of double consciousness is an unwavering sensation that is taxing. For instance, Izzy voiced that he feels like there is a stigma he has to overcome to achieve success. He explained:

People don't believe that Black males can become successful because of all the stereotypes that are placed on them. We have to overcome stereotypes and find

ourselves to succeed. [Because of stereotypes] We are pressured to get good grades and work hard in certain areas just to look for advantages that will help us push forward.

Marcus expressed his experience at a four-year and a two-year college had resulted in him realizing:

Nobody cares about the problems Black males go through because it has been the same thing for like years and years and years, I mean the same exact thing. So, it's like you only have two options. It's either feel sorry for yourself forever, or get up and do something for yourself. Because nobody else cares and anybody else, even though it's not fair, nobody else is going to try to fix it just because of you. You've got to do it for yourself, honestly. Because like with the whole police brutality and people getting all them videos that kind of stuff been happening. Honestly, I don't want to make things about race and I don't want to generalize because I know a lot of good White people. I know a lot of good Hispanics. Everybody's good. But, man, at times I feel like, Black people finish last. I have had people tell me straight out before that they are waiting for me to steal something.

In addition, Marcus shared two stories on how being Black affected him as a college student. First, he mentioned how uncomfortable it is to be a Black male student shopping at Costco with a book bag. Second, he commented on his experience just walking to school. Marcus stated:

One time I was on the line at Costco walking out of the store and I had my school bag on, holding my books and there was this white lady with a bag that looked like she could fit three turkeys in it. The managers let her go by and asked to see my receipt and check inside of my bag. This all happened while I was with my uncle and his family. I didn't want to be disrespectful in front of my uncle so, I just took off my bag and opened it and showed him that there was nothing but books in it and my uncle just started getting really angry. That was the first time I seen him like that but, I was kind of proud of him protecting me but, that kind of stuff happens all the time. It got to the point, that I don't even feel comfortable. Like, if I see a lady walking down the street with her son, and she crosses the street. I'm, like, come on, what do you think of me? [Do I look] Like, I'll hurt an old lady and her son? Like, come on. Like, it got to the point where, when I see the lady, I'll cross the street myself because I don't want her to feel threatened.

To put it another way, participants suggested their race is a burden that creates additional challenges that impact their actions, emotions, and success. For instance, Jay voiced that in college race is important. From his observation, Black male students are usually together because they are most comfortable with someone they identify with. Jay explained:

When you come from the same place, you were raised kind of the same way, and you meet someone [that looks like you], you feel more comfortable. I don't think an African American guy would be cool just walking up to a group of White kids

as opposed to a group of Black kids. That's how I feel, that's how I see it and so far what I've seen is right.

All things considered, participants confirmed that race affected their experience at the community college. They revealed that being a Black male student comes with a negative perception that you are something other than a male seeking to attain an education. Participants also expressed that being a community college student is also a negative stereotype. In either case, the impact of being negatively stereotyped creates depression and discourages students from succeeding. Findings also indicated that negative stereotypes make participants feel alienated and present a viewpoint that no one cares about their development. Consequently, the societal pressure of being a Black male is so taxing that it challenges participants to strive to stay focused in order to succeed. Under those circumstances, Black male community college students have to decide if they are going to portray negative images that are often promoted or achieve their full potential.

Theme 5 - Persistence: The Fight to Stay Focused

Generally speaking, it is expected that students face challenges pursuing a college education. However, all of the participants for this study were able to identify distractions impacting their success. Participants were aware of the unwavering sensation of double consciousness, needing support services, and maintaining the right frame of mind. In addition, they presented evidence that their attitude for attaining a degree coincides with research that suggests intrapersonal factors such as focus or effort affect student success (Wood, Palmer, & Harris, 2015). Not only did participants identify being focused as

essential to attaining a college degree, but they also provided details on how they maintain their focus in an EOF program. For example, as a returning student, Malik shared he learned to focus the hard way. He acknowledged, “I try to keep to myself because that was my problem before, it was being social. Having so many people as friends really distracted me from doing schoolwork. So, now I focus on myself instead of pleasing everyone else.”

Gary shared:

I have to cut myself from all the other distractions. Either move to the opposite [side] of the room or just focus on getting the work done. Some friends in my class would always say, ‘Oh this work is not helping me do this or do that’. And sometimes I might follow what my friends said and not do my work, but then I would think to myself, this is wrong, I can’t really do this. So to prevent that from happening I would either ask the teacher to move to a different spot or either sit closer to her desk or find somewhere I could concentrate without being distracted. Because if I don’t remove myself, I would really mess my grades up, and stop me from doing what I have to learn.

Be that as it may, Gary also emphasized Black males have a misconception about the level of focus that is required for pursuing a college degree. He indicated that staying focused is a challenge for Black males because they often believe the support from EOF insures they will achieve success. He commented:

I feel what affects Black male students is that some of them aren't really focused or some don't have that much support at home so they come to school thinking they going to have all of the support and help from the counselors but some counselors will help you and some counselors won't.

In light of Gary identifying what influenced his decision to enroll in college and participate in an EOF program, he also indicated who helped him to persist. Gary shared:

The only encouragement I really had was my father and my EOF advisor. They really encouraged me to keep going. Because sometimes I felt like I couldn't continue doing it because it was hard, and I was struggling, I didn't feel like I could really pass these classes. And they told me 'you got to take it one step at a time and keep trying and eventually I'll get through it'. And I did.

Mike shared his big picture approach for staying focused and stated:

Just know that everything you're doing now is going to set you up for a better future. So whether it is hard now for you, the struggle you're doing now won't be as bad as the struggle you'll have in 10 to 15 years from now. So, just stay motivated and just believe in the process and know that you're setting yourself up for a better future.

Although participants acknowledged they have to make a conscious decision to transform themselves into successful students, Carmelo highlighted that his motivation to focus is initiated by finances. He explained:

I'm coming here for free, so I'm going to take the initiative and actually, like do something! Why would I come here and have all my classes paid for by financial aid, and sit on my ass and ask for girls' numbers and stuff like that. A lot of people, they don't take advantage of things that they get. So, this is free money. My last class, for example, my statistics class was \$1000. I've never saved, up to, \$1000. That's too much money to just be taking it for granted. Like, my moms, she doesn't really take me to school. She doesn't really give me any money. I live off a refund check.

Pursuing this further, Omarion advocated that being focused is not only a fundamental requirement for Black male students to attain success but also essential for all students. From his experience, being focused consists of an individual doing what needs to be done to fulfill a goal. He emphasized:

You know, EOF and everything aside, it's like you're doing what you got to do. Like most of the people that come in here are people who probably haven't been in school [for] a minute. They all have a certain focus and drive. And it's like we have fun, but it's not about getting that college experience, going to this and that [event]. It's about getting where you need to be, so we can go to a four-year university. Everybody has a certain focus and granted there are some people who don't, but this is where it starts for most people.

Because staying focused is so important, Omarion acknowledged Black male community college students need "an example" to show them how to focus because so many Black males come to community colleges for different reasons. According to

Omarion, “there’s no lack of example, there is [an] example, it’s just whether it’s bad or good”. He commented:

We got different types of Black males. We got some Black males who enlisted in the military and then came back to get their education. So they already have a certain discipline. We’ve got some Black males who got into the workforce early cause they had to support their family. Once they met that glass ceiling, they knew, it’s time for me to get back [to school], so they have a focus. And then we got Black males that come from high school, and they already knew [community college], okay, this is where I’m going, so they didn’t really try hard in high school cause they knew they were coming here. They just needed to test into it [college], and do what they got to do. So what happens, is they don’t just come here [county college] alone, they come here with the same people they were associating themselves with in high school. So instead of being in college, this is the 13th grade.

In other words, Omarion’s assertion indicates Black male students that want to succeed in college attend with a purpose and do not let surrounding pressure distract them from losing focus. As a matter of fact, he stressed the need for students to attend college and stand out. According to Omarion, students that “hear everybody say, oh college is just not for me” they need to realize “no college isn’t for you”. To put it differently, Omarion believes life will become more difficult if Black males never enroll in college. His experience at a community college led to him voicing, “I feel like we need to help ourselves grow in a way, so that the world could see us in a different light”. Ultimately,

fighting to stay focused is a lived experience Black males face as community college students in an EOF program and a tool for their survival.

According to research, fighting to stay focused is not an easy task for African Americans because they have been taught they are inferior in almost every class they enter and in almost every book (Bass, 2011; Dougherty, 2008; Dubois, 1903; Madhubuti, 1991; Wood, 2012; 2014; Welsing, 1974; Woodson, 1933). The impact of these educational experiences is not only offensive but also devastating to the minds of Black students. In the book *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, historian Carter G. Woodson (1933) described these experiences as the mis-education Black students receive in an academic environment and accused the education system of intentionally performing malpractice on Black students because, “when you control a man’s thinking you do not have to worry about his actions” (p. 4). In other words, if Black students are taught that they are incapable of achieving success, then this stereotype becomes a distraction and creates anxiety that leads them to a self-fulfilling prophesy (Moore, Madison-Colmore, & Smith, 2003; Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Dittmann, & Crosby, 2008; Steele, 1992; 1997; 1999). For this reason, the findings for this study revealed Black males are required to fight to stay focused but also must have the right self-efficacy to attain success. For example, as a transfer student, Omarion described his experience at a community college and indicated:

So far the difference, when I compare it to [Steven Hill] is I got control. I got control, I’m controlling my destiny, and it feels like okay, this is me moving the way I want to move. You know, at community colleges it’s more so you’re like on your own.

Omarion believes as a community college student he is responsible for his actions and acknowledged that as a successful community college student he “[has] to have a certain focus and drive” in order to “get to where you need to be”.

From Omarion’s perspective, Black males should be expected to attend and graduate from college. During the interview process he passionately voiced, “Once you get into college everybody’s celebrating, but no, that’s high school, like especially undergrad.” He declared going to college, “It’s not something that’s untouchable anymore.” According to Omarion, the old idea of seeing a Black male enrolled in college or on a college campus should not generate a reaction comparable to seeing a unicorn.

Similar to Omarion, Mike enrolled in college because “a high school diploma can only take you so far.” Mike believes attending college represents investing in his future. Besides allocating time to his future, Mike indicated having the right friends and being in a productive environment are helpful for achieving success. He discussed obstacles and challenges he has encountered pursuing a degree and shared:

My biggest, biggest obstacle is time management; trying to manage my classes.

Well, not really my classes but doing the homework and assignments plus working and also trying to play basketball. It can get hectic at times, but I always make sure I do my homework first before work and school.

Mike’s willingness to concentrate on his studies displays an attitude of resilience. He shared his strategy for overcoming time management and stated:

I feel like if you can write down a day plan or just write down the goals you set for each day, I feel like that sets you up for better success that you can visually

see what you've done and what you plan on doing throughout the whole day and the whole week.

Moreover, Mike's insight is highly appreciated because at the time of his interview, he was the only participant with a 4.0 grade point average.

Although Mike admitted it is a challenge to stay motivated, he advocated that it is important for Black males to understand their purpose for attending college and shared:

You know coming here the first day it was a little depressing, not knowing anybody and staying focused in class. But once I got used to the process, I stayed motivated by reminding myself why I am doing this. I feel as if that will help you in the long run.

On the other hand, Jay's challenge as a community college student in EOF is procrastination. He identified procrastination as a challenge he has to overcome and voiced that it is slowly fading away since deciding to come in early and meet with tutors for assistance. Despite Jay's procrastination challenge, he believes there are four factors that can affect his success as a community college student. He declared the first factor is not being "properly prepared" and not having maturity. Second, falling victim to distractions such as hanging out in the college's common area with friends. According to Jay, it is easy to be "more concerned about going out" and joining an environment that influences you to "not do what you're supposed to be doing". Third, you "don't have nothing to motivating you". In fact, Jay pointed out as a Black male you have to find activities and events to participate in because you need something that "pushes you to

what you [should be] doing”. Fourth, he indicated financial concerns can deter his academic progress.

Given these points, Jay highlighted the need for why it is important for Black males to be resilient in school. Moreover, findings for this study reflect research that suggests Black males who are trying to succeed have what researchers call the “prove them wrong syndrome” (Moore, Madison-Colmore, & Smith, 2003). They have the required discipline to constantly evaluate, demonstrate, and maintain focus not only through words but also actions. For instance, Teddy indicated that his success at a community college is affected by his laziness. He admitted that he is lazy when he is at home and does not complete his homework assignments because there are a lot of distractions at home. According to Teddy, his little sister, video game console, laptop, and cell phone are distractions. In order to overcome his laziness, Teddy shared that as a daytime student he prefers to stay at the community college up until 7 p.m. to complete his coursework.

In the same way Teddy is conscientious about when and where to study, Izzy shared “I realized for myself that I study better at night, not during the day”. He asserted that he focuses better at night and “that’s how I get my work done”.

In the final analysis, the academic success of participants in this study suggested Black male students who are successful hold themselves responsible and have the resilience to persist at attaining a college degree despite the naysayers and the odds. They are able to stay strong by performing self-checks to remind them of their purpose for

attending college and they are mindful enough to evaluate their surroundings and seek help when necessary.

Chapter Five

Summary, Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

Black Males, Community College, and EOF

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of Black male students in an Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program at a community college. Historically, Black males enroll in community college and often experience a variety of challenges, which deter their academic and career pursuits (Peter, 2006; Mosby, 2009; Wood, 2010). This study examined the lived experience of Black males progressing within a support program at a community college and found five themes that capture their experience. The themes were: (a) EOF provides a supportive atmosphere; (b) family and peer influence; (c) community college is a stepping stone; (d) being a Black male and a community college student; and (e) persistence: the fight to stay focused.

Collectively, these five themes revealed that the lived experience of Black males in an EOF program at community college is complex. The findings in this study shaped the experience of Black males through support, influence, consciousness, purpose, and resilience. Research and significant statements illustrated participants' perceptions about being a Black male participating in an EOF program and attending a community college.

Although these themes were found to shape the experiences of Black male community college students in EOF, results from this study indicated that regardless of a community college's effort to provide additional support, Black males pursuing a college degree experience double consciousness and are vulnerable to actions that derail their

progress. Additional findings indicated Black males are extremely appreciative of the services and the commitment EOF provides, but they also acknowledged that the program can only do so much to develop their confidence. Findings revealed Black males must have the innate fortitude to transform any situation they encounter into an opportunity to rise.

Consequently, if Black male community college students do not have the determination to succeed, when they experience double or multiple levels of consciousness it remind them they are something other than students seeking to attain upward mobility. For instance, Black male students who are conscious about the negative perceptions society has about community colleges expressed that being associated with such stereotypes creates the feeling of being academically unqualified (Dabney-Smith 2009; Flowers, 2006; Hampton, 2002; Mosby, 2009; Pope, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008). On the other hand, Black male students that are able to overlook being negatively stereotyped attend and view community college as a place where they can develop. Under these circumstances, Black males who are fighting to stay focused and to persist in college experience what is known as the “prove them wrong syndrome” (Moore, Madison-Colmore, & Smith, 2003; Smith, Fleming, Moore, Burris, & Bornmann, 2014). As a result of such findings, this study indicate more extensive research needs to be conducted to expand the meaning of being a Black male student in a program at a community college designed to help them succeed.

Discussion

Pope (2006) indicated that community colleges are the matriculation venue for large numbers of African American males seeking to attain postsecondary education.

With this in mind, this study sought to examine the lived experience of Black males at a community college participating in an EOF program and found that their experiences are complex. Findings from this study showed that Black male students face a multitude of challenges attending a community college and must have the fortitude to succeed. In addition to students needing the strength to flourish, this study found it extremely important for an institution to demonstrate the courage and commitment to support Black male achievement. Given these points, findings revealed that the lived experience of Black male students in EOF consists acknowledging the program as a supportive atmosphere; family and peers influencing their enrollment and progression; treating community college as a stepping stone; the duality of being a Black male and a community college student; and fighting to stay focused to persist. Results from this study provide literature on the lived experience of Black males in an EOF program at a community college and identifies their perceptions, and the impact of inside and outside of class experiences. That is to say, this study may serve as an initial point of conversation on Black males persisting in a support program at a community college.

All things considered, findings from this study are not necessarily generalizable to all community colleges and Black male students, but they can be used to enhance the experiences of Black males pursuing postsecondary education. By the same token, the information provided from this study can also be a resource for institutions and college personnel attempting to create an environment that engages and motivates African American male students in their academic pursuit.

In order to enhance the experience of Black male students at a community college in an EOF program, college personnel and other individuals connected to this population

need to understand their purpose for pursuing a college degree. According to participants, they are pursuing a postsecondary education to secure a promising future because they do not want to struggle academically, financially, or professionally. Participants indicated that they not only want stability in their lives but also the ability to live by their merits because it allows them to feel accepted in society. Notably, students expressed they do not want to worry about the effects of their surroundings and problems such as negative stereotyping, discrimination, and racism. Black males view enrolling at a community college as a worthwhile investment they cannot afford to lose in order to live comfortably. To put it another way, Black males enroll at a community college and in an EOF program because they want to achieve success based on their effort and consider their quest for attaining a college degree as the groundwork for upward mobility. In addition, their matriculation allows them to develop and avoid being inactive in their academic and career pursuits.

In light of these findings, research points out “since their inception, community colleges have served as a crucial gateway for individuals seeking postsecondary education” (Bazile, 2009, p. 1). According to research, community colleges are an important asset to our society because they offer students the opportunity to attain an education at an affordable price and are conveniently located (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Pope, 2006; Wood, 2012; 2014). After examining the lived experiences of Black male community college students in an EOF program, participants indicated that they view and treat community college as a stepping stone to advance their education, career, personal development, or to occupy time for them to make a decision about their future.

Overwhelmingly, participants shared that attending college is necessary if they want to have a positive future. With this in mind, findings from this study suggest Black males who are willing to educate themselves persist (Catching, 2008; Gebru, 2009; Moore, Madison-Colmore, & Smith, 2003). The most compelling evidence from this study indicates academically successful Black males understand what obstacles deter their success and are able to apply strategies to counteract their challenges. In addition, participants advocated that EOF is influential to securing their academic progress in higher education and their career. This research correlated with Wood and Hilton's (2012) persistence research, which suggested institutions provide African American males with academic-success programs to establish a sense of belonging to an institution. Despite participants considering their race a burden, they felt strongly connected to their community college and EOF.

Although data from this study indicated Black males recognize EOF had a significant impact on their experience as community college students, data also identified the program's supportive atmosphere offered Black males someone they can identify with, follow, and learn from on campus. For example, all of the participants in this study had an African American male EOF advisor, which resulted in them expressing their comfort in both the program and the community college. Participants viewed their African American male advisors as mentors because they believe Black males share similar experiences. As a matter of fact, some participants indicated their advisor treats them like family; provides warmth and love; and encourages their engagement at the institution. Other participants declared their EOF advisor had such an impact on their

academic success that any achievement without their support would have made their higher education experience extremely difficult.

Given these points, the responsibility for assuring Black male students experience academic and career success in an EOF program at a community college is both the students' and the institutions' (Mosby, 2009; Harris & Wood, 2013; Wood, 2013; 2014; Wood & Hilton, 2012). In order for students to attain success they must be conscious of factors that impede their success and avoid distractions such as racism and being negatively stereotyped (Bush, 2004; Hickman, 2008; Wood, Hilton, & Hicks, 2014). For instance, Wood and Hilton (2012) noted that students must maintain a frame of mind that keeps them committed to, engaged in, and focused on their goals. At the same time, institutional leaders, policy makers, and program designers must meet the need of the students (Bush, Bush, & Wilcoxson 2009; Wood & Hilton, 2012). In other words, both parties are responsible for making sure the lived experience of Black males in community college is not a river infested with more mines than bridges (Bush & Bush, 2010).

Answers to research questions. To identify the lived experience of Black males in an EOF program at a community college there were three research questions that guided this study. These questions were exploratory in nature and describe the essence of being a Black male pursuing a degree in a support program designed to help them succeed. The following are answers to my research questions.

What are the lived experiences of Black men in an EOF program at a community college? The lived experiences of Black males at a community college in an EOF program are complex. This complexity is created because Black males have a

multitude of challenges that interfere with their academic and career pursuit of happiness. As one participant articulated, these complexities continue to emerge because “nobody cares about the problems Black males go through because it has been the same thing for years.” In an attempt to answer this question, my findings point out that the complexity of being a Black male student revolves around double consciousness. Because participants have revealed they feel a peculiar sensation to be Black and American or Black and a community college student it is difficult to find their purpose. Notably, participants for this study revealed their enrollment in a community college is to make their families and friends proud, to earn a credential for employment, or transfer to a four-year college or university.

The five themes found in this study illustrated Black males want to be in a comfortable environment that is supportive to their needs. They want to be able make friends and experience personal growth. For example, Wood and Hilton (2012) pointed out that when Black male students are in positive relationships with their peers during academic pursuits it positively affects their success. In addition, they treat a community college as a stepping stone to use an institution as a channel for change. Although Black males use community college as a path for advancement, findings for this study suggest their experience matriculating at a community college requires them to have the desire and tenacity to succeed. Black males are challenged to stay focused and must have a centralized purpose.

Given these points, Black males must understand that the purpose of their education is not to be “neither a psychologist nor a brickmason, but a man” (Dubois,

1903, p. 66). If not, the lived experience of Black males in an EOF program at a community college is comparable to driving on a dark road without any headlights.

How do issues of race (double consciousness) impact the experiences of Black men at a community college in an EOF program? As has been noted, the lived experiences of Black males in an EOF program at a community college are complex. The primary reason their experience is complex is due to the impact of their race. Findings from this study highlight Black male experiences were affected by double consciousness or additional levels of consciousness such as triple consciousness (Pope, 2006). According to Pope (2006), triple consciousness refers to Black males in higher education experiencing three roles as students. Pope suggests Black males pursuing a degree experience being Black, American, and first-generation students from adverse backgrounds. Although scholars such as Mitchell and Means (2014) also found Black males experience quadruple consciousness, which pertains to Black males sexuality, participants in this study did not mention anything about their sexual orientation. Because research suggests double consciousness can be conceptualized in so many ways (Black, 2012), I listened to participants' stories and identified how race impacted their experiences in and outside of class. Participants shared stories about being negatively stereotyped because of race, academic background, gender, or socioeconomic status. However, they found comfort being able to converse and learn from other African American males. Participants expressed having advisor and the support of others that look like them helped their growth. Nevertheless, Black males were extremely pleased with the presence of having Black males advisors. Although they were comfortable within the EOF community, outside of the EOF community and the college is where

issues developed. At times students were depressed, were not treated equal, felt alienated, and felt an extra pressure to prove other wrong. Ultimately, Black males expressed that they view their race as being a burden.

What role does an EOF program play in the persistence of Black men enrolled in community college? After conducting research on how an Educational Opportunity Fund program can affect student success, I now have insight on how Black males use the program to persist. According to research, community colleges are often viewed as extensions of high school (Bazile, 2009; Clark, 1960; 1980; Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Vaughan, 1982). With this in mind, one thing that is different while matriculated at a community college is the support students receive from participating in an EOF program. Findings for this study revealed EOFs play a crucial role in providing support to students' persistence. Black male students use the program for support, and academic and social integration. In fact, the program coincides with Wood and Hilton's (2012) research on recommendations for a student support program to enhance persistence. For instance, Wood and Hilton found that students believe the establishment of a Black academic success program should include: (a) a peer mentoring program that allows more senior students to mentor incoming students; (b) workshops on challenges facing first-generation college students, including data on African American male success in education and in society; (c) creating awareness and usage of campus resources; (d) educating students on campus policies, such as how to understand which classes to take and when to take them; (e) establishing a strong self-determination component that provides open and honest dialogue with students on what is expected to succeed in college and in their future careers; (f) proactively addressing students needs such as

transportation, housing and grades by providing access to support services and resources. Findings for this study indicated Black males experience in an EOF program were parallel to Wood and Hilton's recommendations for enhancing a Black male success program. For example, findings in this study highlighted the EOF program is not only a helpful resource but also directs students to other resources to use on campus. These findings coincide with Wood and Hilton's recommendation to create awareness and usage of campus resources. In addition to students being aware of the resources on campus and utilizing them, they were also peer mentors to students, which provided both space for open and honest dialogue to discuss what is expected to succeed as a college student in their future careers. In addition, the uniqueness of all of the Black males in this study having a Black male advisor, they felt they had a role model, mentor, brother, and family member on campus. Participants also expressed that their participation in an EOF program is vital to their success especially when they have to fight to stay focused. Black male students expressed the program helped their development and persistence by providing comfort during some of their most vulnerable moments. Given these points, students have described the program as an extension of their family with valuable resources for their progression.

Recommendations

Previous studies that focus on Black male community college students discuss topics such as athletics; developmental courses; personal and academic pressures, retention; and student recommendations for a success program. Because there is limited research that focuses on Black males attending community colleges in a support program

such as an Educational Opportunity Fund, this study is an addition to the extant literature. Inquiring about Black male community college students in EOF indicated that the lived experience of Black males is extremely complex. Although the findings for this study are not universal to all Black male community college students, the following three recommendations from this study can be used to enhance the experience of this specific group and individuals connected to this population.

The first recommendation is to increase the presence of African American male faculty and staff on campus. Data from this study indicated it is important for an African American male student to have someone they can identify with on campus. With this in mind, the first recommendation for this study suggests community college leaders consciously work to improve the presence of African American male faculty on campus. One reason for this recommendation is Black male students feel strongly connected to other African American males (Gebru, 2009; Pope, 2006). According to participants, they view African American male faculty and staff as mentors because they believe they share similar experiences. As an illustration, research advocates the more African American men are in faculty and staff positions, the more encouragement African American male students will have because they will be visually reminded that they can be successful as well (Pope, 2006).

Ultimately, it is extremely important that community college leaders specifically encourage African American males to apply for vacant positions because their presence on campus can have a three-fold effect. First, it can help the degree completion rate of African American male students. Second, it can eliminate some racism and

discriminatory hiring practices. Last, it can promote diversity and suggest individuals of all colors and creeds have the opportunity to succeed.

The second recommendation is to require more support to an EOF program. The additional support can be used to help offer additional financial support to student such as Marcus who may not need the academic support the program offers. Additional support can be in the programs that are offered such as career fairs, instant admit days, to four-year college and universities, networking events, or additional funding to bring in guest speakers to specifically speak about issues and challenges Black male students encounter during their academic pursuits.

According to Wood and Hilton (2012), it is important that Black males see the utility of college. Therefore, hosting events that allow students to see the utility of a college degree by have successful African American male authors, scholars, and business men come to campus provides an life changing experiences. In the book Know Thyself, Dr. Na'am Akbar (1998) noted, "ideas that tell our story, and generate respect for us as a people is the result of effective education" (p. 42). With this in mind, when Black male students attend such an event they are able to learn about a specific career field, build their social capital, and have an example or examples of an individual/s overcoming challenges they may have in common.

Providing additional support to an EOF program is important because findings from this study indicated African American male students experience a peculiar sensation that has been referred to as double consciousness. According to research, the impact of this sensation leads African American males to view themselves as sort of a seventh son,

born with a veil in a world that yields him no true self-consciousness (Dubois, 1903). Although this may be true, research advocates Black men have “this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self” that will not be lost (Dubois, 1903, p. 9). For this reason, additional support to an EOF program provides students with the wherewithal to learn about different careers, expand their social capital, reduce the cost of their academic pursuit,

Generally speaking, the impact from such an initiative can demonstrate how genuine college leaders and the institution are willing to support diversity. At the same time, providing additional support to make African American students more comfortable on a campus course establishes an opportunity to increase diversity on campus by featuring guest speakers, events and activities on campus.

The last recommendation to improve the experience of Black males at a community college in a support program is to establish discussion sessions for students to discuss topics of mutual interest. According to research, Black male community college students want workshops that discuss challenges they face and advice on how to succeed in education and in society (Laster, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012). Establishing rap sessions in the form of luncheons, forums, seminars, or conferences that feature former Black male students that have successfully attained a college degree or excelled in a career will be helpful. Because participants in this study identified the need for an “example”, former students can be viewed as mentors and encourage current students to progress. In fact, research suggests it is imperative that African American males have mentors as they matriculate through the community college system (Pope, 2006).

Connecting African American male community college students to former successful Black male students provides not only an example for success; it promotes degree completion and motivation to pursue a four-year degree. Equally important, if Black male students do not want to attend a four-year college, their attendance at a discussion session can present information and resources for excelling in a career.

Implications for Future Research

One of the primary goals of this research is to increase the number of Black male community college students attaining a college degree. To achieve this task, additional research needs to be conducted in order to have a more in-depth understanding of what Black male community college students experience in an EOF program. Because this study is exploratory in nature, there are several opportunities for additional research. For example, findings from this study suggest there is a need to examine the lived experience of Black males from specific cultural backgrounds within EOF. Although all of the participants for this study considered themselves African American, further research should compare ethnic differences because Black is more inclusive and African is a specific subgroup. Findings from this study indicated a need to examine the internal differences between younger and older Black male EOF students as well. In addition, researchers should examine the experience of reverse transfer EOF students. Be that as it may, there needs to be, not only additional studies conducted at other community colleges, but also an updated study revisiting the academic and career outcome of Black male students who participated in this study.

Leadership Reflection

As a leader, I believe one should never stop learning. To put it another way, “life is a laboratory for learning” (Goldman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). With this in mind, I examined the lived experience of Black males in an EOF program at a community college and learned that this particular group of students wants and needs examples to help them achieve success. From a leadership perspective, these findings have not only infused my aspirations to become a community college president but have also provided me with an understanding of what some students experience, and the importance of being a social justice leader.

According to Theoharis (2007), a social justice leader places significant value on diversity to deeply learn about and understand diversity. In an educational setting, a social justice leader demands that every child will be successful while collaboratively addressing the problems of how to achieve that success (p. 252). In other words, a social justice leader is ultimately concerned with situations of marginalization (p. 223). Reflecting on my role as a social justice leader at a community college, I am required to support, respect, care, recognize and empathize with students to in order to raise their achievement. It is my duty to ensure that students receive fair treatment within the higher education system by making sure they have a voice and their needs are addressed.

In order to ensure that students are heard and receive fair treatment, my role as a social justice leader is to speak up for injustice and the expose flaws within the higher education system until all populations have evenly distributed equity in the governance of an institution. To put it differently, I plan to use the findings from this study and future

studies to initiate change by “discussing the undiscussable” (Argyris, 1994, p. 349). For example, I will help increase the recruitment of African American males in the high education system by introducing and shedding light on careers within higher education. In particular, I will highlight the need for Black males to become presidents, deans, and professors along with architects, doctors, engineers, lawyers, and service men.

Given that postsecondary institutions have a dearth of Black male presidents and academic deans, research suggests no matter how creditable a Black male is, there is no easy pathway to the presidency (Bowen, 1996; Bugg, 2010; Vaughan, 1996). Under these circumstances, research advocates “the most important step in becoming a college president is to develop a can-do attitude” (Bowen, 1996, p. 17). In other words, my initiative and leadership to encourage students must not only be voiced but also shown. Therefore, I will continue to develop and participate in roles, events, and activities that help my advancement and attainment of knowledge to assume a presidency at a postsecondary institution.

In conclusion, my experience as an investigator on Black males in higher education, I learned that my presence as an administrator, faculty, or staff member within a community college establishes me as a leader not only to Black males but to all students, because my presence in academic or administrative position symbolizes to students that I have the courage and fortitude to overcome recognized and unrecognized barriers. The results from this study support this perspective, and but it also illustrates that double consciousness is omnipresent and I must project the belief that experience,

coupled with guidance, is a winning combination for not only students but myself as well (Bowen, 1996).

Credibility

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, research suggests there are eight procedures for an investigator to follow (Creswell, 2007). These eight procedures consist of prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer review, negative case analysis, clarifying research bias, member checking, rich thick description, and external audits. According to Creswell, engaging in at least two of the eight procedures makes a study reliable. In addition to making the data process more reliable, this study used Creswell's (2007) template for coding a phenomenological study, which consists of bracketing, significant statements, meaning units, textural description, and structural descriptions to capture the essence of the phenomenon in question. The data collected from respondents, research on community colleges, retention strategies, and support programs were also used to understand the lived experience of Black males in an EOF program at a community college.

In addition to the data analysis process, I clarified my bias as a researcher by bracketing out my experience as a two-year college student in a support program. I discussed assumptions that influenced and shaped my inquiry and provided a rich and thick description that described participants and their experiences in the setting being studied. Given these points, the validation and evaluation of this study is trustworthy and reliable because the analysis process used not only the recommended amount of

procedures for a qualitative study but also includes an additional process to ensure creditability.

Limitations

Although findings from this study represented authentic experiences of a particular group of Black males in an EOF program at a community college, the results from this study cannot be generalizable to all Black male students in EOF programs. This study is study represents on one of the 19 community colleges In addition, this study excludes the lived experience of Black female students attending a community college. This study only consists of responses from participants at a community college in New Jersey.

While there are EOF programs at four-year and two-year colleges, this study is centered on the perceptions and experiences of Black men at a two-year college in an EOF program. In 2012, the New Jersey State of Higher Education reported that 36% (4,431) of the students that enrolled in an EOF program were African Americans. This figure indicates that African Americans are the largest ethnic group to participate in EOF programs. However, the examination of the Black female experiences has been left out of this study because unlike the achievements of Black men, Black female have an increased rate of degree attainment when compared to Black men (NCES, 2014). The information that is articulated in this study is limited to benefit the members that work with this population of Black men, support programs, at community colleges, and Black families.

Conclusion

Findings from this study suggest the lived experiences of Black males in an EOF program are complex. Participants indicated that complications emerge because they have to fight to stay focused while encountering problems such as educational racism (Hickman, 2008; Mosby, 2009; Swaidan, 2010; Wood, 2013; 2014). As a matter of fact, the findings assert Black male students share the belief that it is their duty to maintain focus and progress by any means necessary. Black male students revealed that their persistence at a community college and participation in an EOF program is only as successful as their effort. They are required to find ways to eliminate distractions by engaging themselves in productive activities such as utilizing the academic learning center, becoming a peer tutor, communicating with an advisor, and maintaining employment. All things considered, Black males pursuing a postsecondary degree at a community college in an EOF program must have the determination to advance academically, personally, and financially.

Despite Black males needing the fortitude to succeed, their experiences at a community college in an EOF program are not monolithic (Swaidan, 2010; Wood, 2013). However, participants acknowledged that engaging in a program such as EOF teaches them that they have the option to either “feel sorry for yourself” or “get up and do something for yourself”. In either case, this study found Black male community college students in EOF believe if they do not pursue a postsecondary education they would be placing their future at risk and struggling to advance their socioeconomic status.

In essence, Black male students revealed they entered a community college because they were seeking success in their life and “don't want to continue to struggle” as one student told me. Black male students understand their experience at a community college in an EOF program not only provides a supportive environment but also leads to success. With this in mind, community colleges that want to continue to be valuable options for Black males they must continue to increase the support offered to Black males by providing a clearer path that will allow them to stay focused and achieve upward mobility. The goal of students, parents, administrators, faculty, and staff connected to Black male students at a community college in an EOF program must be to provide an experience that assures upward mobility instead of uncertainty.

Because there is extensive research on Black males in postsecondary education and few studies that examine Black males in community colleges (Mosby, 2009; Pope, 2006; Wood, 2010), this study contributes to literature on Black male community college students and support programs. In addition, further research needs to investigate the lived experiences of Black males at community colleges in a support program such as EOF within and outside of the state of New Jersey.

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Appendix A
Recruitment Flyer



BLACK MALE
EOF
COLLEGE
STUDENTS
NEEDED

FOR A DOCTORAL RESEARCH STUDY

- FOCUS IS ON THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS
- MUST BE 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER
- ONLY 30 MINUTES TO AN HOUR OF YOUR TIME IS NEEDED
- YOUR PARTICIPATION WILL HELP TO INCREASE THE PERSISTENCE OF BLACK MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS

**IF YOU ARE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE PLEASE CONTACT LAVON WILLIAMS FOR MORE
INFORMATION
(518) 657-9594**

Appendix B

Email Message

The Experiences of Black Men at a Community College in an Educational Opportunity Fund Program

Dear _____:

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Professor James Coaxum at Rowan University. I am conducting a research study to understand the experiences of Black men at a Community College in an Educational Opportunity Fund program.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve an audio-recorded interview taking about 45 minutes to an hour of your time. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time. I am requesting that you read, complete and return the attached Informed Consent form if you accept my invitation to participate in the study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty, nor will it affect your current or future status as a student. The results of the study may be published; however, your name will not be used.

All interview data will be kept locked up and secured and will be destroyed immediately after the conclusion of this study.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (518) 657-9594. You can also contact Rowan University if you have additional questions. The contact information is on the Inform Consent form.

Sincerely,

LaVon Williams
Doctoral Student

Appendix C

Personal Letter Accompanying Letter of Invitation

Dear _____,

You have been identified as an African American male who is enrolled at community college and in an Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program. As such, I am soliciting your participation in a very important study.

Please allow me to explain. Among the many students who attend community colleges and participate in an EOF program, Black male students have a low graduation rate. Some of the factors that cause this result are low socioeconomic status, poverty, racism, lack of education preparation, and low achieving urban educational environments. However, this study aims to understand the experiences that impact Black men at a community college in an EOF program.

As an African American male, I am committed to helping other African Americans become successful. However, as you know, before a problem can be addressed it must be described.

This study is simple in concept. *It attempts to find out the lived experience of African American male students at a Community College in an EOF program. It seeks to find if African American male students share any common strategies, traits, characteristics or experiences that contribute to their success. It also attempts to ascertain the obstacles and hardships African American students have to overcome in route to becoming successful.*

Your participation would be greatly appreciated. I have made every attempt to keep the requirements on your valuable time to a minimum. The attached form contains more detailed information on the study and I sincerely hope that you will consider being part of this worthwhile research.

If you have any other questions please don't hesitate to call me at (518) 657-9594.

Sincerely,

LaVon Williams
Doctoral Student

Appendix D

Consent Form

Two copies of the consent form must be signed by you. Please retain a copy for yourself and I will keep a copy for my records. If you have any questions following the study, you may contact LaVon Williams at (518) 657-9594 or lavi.williams@yahoo.com.

I _____, give my consent to take part in LaVon Williams research study regarding the experiences of Black men at a community college in an Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program. I understand that I will be answering questions concerning my own experience as a Black male at a community college in the EOF program. I understand that my participation is voluntary for this study. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, if I withdraw; I understand that my interview questions will be destroyed.

To ensure confidentiality, I understand that LaVon Williams will use an alternative name and keep my responses secure in a locked folder on his Macbook. All records will be kept for the minimum of three years after publication of the study. At the end of that time, the data will be destroyed permanently.

If I would like a copy of the result of this study, I can e-mail LaVon Williams at lavi.williams@yahoo.com.

I understand that my participation in this study will require responding to interview questions in a single session that will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour. I may refrain from answering any question at any time and I may stop participating in the study at any time with no negative repercussions.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

These interview questions were designed to elicit responses related to each student's demographic information, their family's background, community college experience, and educational status. The listed interview questions will be asked to each interviewee. Although each question will be used, certain responses may warrant more probing questions. In the case that more information is necessary, the probing questions will be listed.

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Purpose of the Study: Is simply in concept. It attempts to find out the lived experience of African American male students at a Community College in an EOF program. It seeks to find if African American male students share any common strategies, traits, characteristics or experiences that contribute to their success. It also attempts to ascertain the obstacles and hardships African American students have to overcome in route to becoming successful.

Questions:

1. Tell me about your experience as a community college student in an Educational Opportunity Fund program?

2. What led to your interest in attending college?

3. From your perspective, how would you describe your experiences at your community

college? Explain.

4. How has the EOF program affected those experiences? Explain.
5. How did your family or friends influence your decision to attend college? Explain.
6. What sources of support have you encountered while pursuing your degree? Explain.
7. What obstacles, or challenges did you encounter while pursuing your degree?
8. How have you managed/worked through those obstacles or challenges?
9. What do you believe affects the success of Black males at this college?
10. How well do you think Black males are performing at this college?
11. Do you feel strongly connected to Black people on campus?