A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: EXPLORING THE NEEDS, WANTS, AND DESIRES
FROM THE VOICES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES DESIRING TO GRADUATE
FROM COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

Yvette Monique Harris

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore factors that could lead to academic success for African-American males enrolled in community college. By conducting a phenomenological study, those factors leading to graduation will be derived from the particular lens of perception of the participants’ lived experiences. The guiding theories are those of Derrick Bell’s Critical Race Theory (CRT, 1977), Vincent Tinto’s (1975) Theory of Departure, and John Bean’s (1979) Theory of Student Attrition. A convenience participant sample totaling 10 African-American males was comprised of students who were currently enrolled in a community college. The data collected for this study was garnered from a questionnaire, interviews, and surveys. Said data was analyzed using Moustakas’ (1994) phenomenological seven-step approach. The data from the study resulted in three themes emerging from the data. The themes included trauma, anger, and systems of support. The final chapter is composed of recommendations based on data results and indicated unresolved research privations.

Keywords: Hegemony, Structural Racism, Ontological, Culturally Proficient, Epistemological
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Yvette Monique Harris
Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my parents. Posthumously, for my mother Elaine Deloras Randolph who poured into me a lifetime of wisdom in the 22 years I had the honor of her presence in my life. Also to my dad, Albert Russell Harris; thank you for your continued love, protection, and support. You are and have always been an extraordinary dad and a blessing beyond measure in my life.
Acknowledgments

There are so many who have had some role in assisting me with completing not only this dissertation, but also my entire postsecondary education career. Posthumously, I acknowledge my sister Robin, the oldest of all my sisters. Her love and smile along with her advice I will never forget. Tina and Lila, I have always looked up to both of you. I love you as sisters, but most of all as friends. Thank you for loving me back. To Cynthia Kemp Harris, you have and continue to be the stepmother that resembles the perfection God had for a woman in this role. Your love and support for me along with all you have done in this family does not go unnoticed. I am eternally grateful to you. To my nieces and nephew, Andrea, Alexandra, and Michael, I love you and am so proud of you. To the women in my family who served as elders giving wisdom and guidance, I thank you posthumously: Lila Dennis, Susie Seawright, Madeline Burns, and Oletha Randolph; I am because you were.

When I made the decision to accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior, he put in my life his very best teachers. From 1991 until she transitioned to heaven, Dr. Carolyn Lorraine Harrell taught me the Word of God and loved me as if I were her daughter. He added her sister, Apostle Peggy Scott to continue as my mentor and friend. Thank you for your support and love. In 2012, my pastor, Dr. Clyde A. Stewart and his wife, Sister Florencia along with the Westside Christian Center family took me in. Thank you to all of you for treating me as family from the first time we met. Continue to stand up and praise. Most importantly, thank you Pastor for teaching me the Word of God along with encouraging me, praying, and supporting me in this endeavor.

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I will not say last because He is first in my life. My Heavenly Father, Wonderful Counselor, Provider, Peace giver, Lover of my Soul, Help in time of Trouble, Strength, Refuge, All in All, Bright and Morning Star, Joy and Creator! Daddy Jesus, Abba Father, thank you for giving me the opportunity to work this work. It is my hope that You are pleased and will be glorified. I called unto you and you did show me this great and mighty thing I knew not of. You showed up and showed out. You gave this child everything I needed and then some. Lord, I thank you for this season and praise You for all you have done and are about to accomplish through my life. AMEN!
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List of Abbreviations

Advanced Placement (AP)
American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan (ACLU)
Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)
Critical Race Theory (CRT)
Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA)
Grade Point Average (GPA)
Homeless or Highly Mobile (HHM)
Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)
National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a framework for this qualitative research study. Chapter One will provide an introduction to the study. Also provided in this chapter is the background along the significance of the study including the purpose and problem statements are described in the chapter. Additionally, the research questions guiding the study are included in this chapter. Finally, the research plan for conducting the study and the delimitations and limitations for the study are discussed.

Background

This qualitative phenomenological study aims to explore continuance to graduation from community college for African-American males. Continuance for this population means obtaining a degree from community college within three years while maintaining a cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) of at least 2.0. This investigation contributed to the limited body of knowledge that addresses strength-based factors that interpenetrate educational continuance for African-American males resulting in graduation from community college. According to Harris and Wood (2013), the community college system serves as an institution that provides post-secondary education opportunity for African-American males who choose or are not able to begin studies at the four-year college or university level. However, Harris and Wood also noted that only 38.6% of African-American males who enroll in a community college system graduate within six years (p. 3). According to the 2015 Student Success Scorecard of the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO; 2015, page withheld for confidentiality), the percentage of African-American graduates was 36.8% for the period 2008-2014. By juxtaposition, Superville (2015) reported a continued increase in community college graduation
rates for Caucasian males resulting in a widening gap between the two demographics. This academic torpor or sluggishness for the African-American male occurs regardless of research showing that graduation from a community college may lead to advantages in the social and economic areas of their lives (Baum & Ma, 2007; Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010, 2013; Baum & Payea, 2007; National Center for Health Statistics (US), & National Center for Health Services Research, 2011).

Although the community college continues to serve as a potential and critical gateway for African-American males who desire to attend college (Bush & Bush, 2005), it in and of itself addresses neither the specificity of inculcated socio-historic indicators that are potentially prohibitive, nor the strength-based resiliencies that potentially nurture and inspire success. The community college provides higher education courses leading to a variety of associates degrees for students who choose or are unable to enroll in a traditional four-year post secondary institution (Levinson, 2005). The completion of an associate’s degree provides the opportunity to transfer to a four-year institution and the potential obtainment of a bachelor’s degree. The American Association of Community Colleges (2015) reported there were 7.4 million students enrolled in community colleges in 2013 (para. 1). Despite this large national community college enrollment total, the NCES QuickStats (2014 as cited in ETS’s Addressing Achievement Gaps Symposium) reported that only 17% of African-American males enrolled in community colleges will earn their associates degree in six years or less (p. 2). The data confirms prior research that the community college might serve as a beginning in a continuum of higher education experiences for the African-American male (Bush & Bush, 2005; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001-2002; Lewis & Middleton, 2003; Wood, 2012c), but may not have in place infrastructures to ensure continuance to graduation and beyond.
The community college opens the door for many students to enter the world of post-secondary education. According to Bush and Bush (2005), the community college is the primary post-secondary level where African-American males begin their college careers. Consequently, not completing the degree during the initial enrollment might curtail the stated primary post-secondary educational opportunity (Bush & Bush, 2005). Much of the research regarding the African-American male and postsecondary experiences focused on academic skill deficiencies, non-degree attainment, and student attrition rates (Harper, 2012; Rovai, Gallien, & Stiff-Williams, 2007). A decided gap in the literature is the community college experience as seen and examined through a model of cultural relativity where the lens of perception is that of the subjects themselves, and where the epistemological realities of their lived experiences are the yardstick that measures and demarcates indicators of success.

This research study used the conceptual frameworks of Derrick Bell’s (1977) critical race theory (CRT), Tinto’s (1975) theory of departure, and John Bean’s (1977) theory of student attrition. Bean focused his theory of attrition on the non-traditional commuter student. Tinto developed his theory based upon the student who does not integrate socially into the institutional environment. The commuter student may also have familial, work, and other obligations in addition to course studies. Critical Race Theory (CRT) was developed in the 1970s through the racial inequities in the legal field. In education, CRT looks at multi-determined inequities in educational institutions that marginalize African Americans thus classifying them as deficient.

There have been studies conducted to determine continuance in community college for males of other cultures (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993; Crisp, Nora, & Taggart, 2009). The literature also discussed various differences between African American and Caucasian students (Allen, 1986), race and student achievement (Harper, 2009), and the
achievement gap between Caucasian and African-American males along with difficulties faced in community college systems (Rovai et al., 2007). There is a gap in the literature of phenomenological studies seeking to explore what is perceived as continuance leading to graduation of African-American males in community college from the particular evaluation of the African-American male.

**Situation to Self**

The insinuation of the researcher in this study resides in profoundly felt epistemological, ontological, and axiological realities of education as a door opener for both individual economic opportunities and collective socio-historic justice. Further, the researcher believes that the man should be the leader of his family, that the father sets the tone for how men should treat women, wives, and daughters. How men treat their daughters has long-lasting positive or negative imprints on the way adult daughters relate to males in their life including potential choices for mates and husbands. When the African-American male is not positioned as the head of the family due to a myriad of sociological indicators—lack of education and sustainable employment, mass incarceration, violence, premature non-natural deaths, internalized hopelessness, rage, etc.—the healthy sustainability of the African-American community teeters on a brink of possible extinction. The researcher’s belief is that education is a pivotal opportunity that needs profound and capacious persecution for not only, but especially, the Black male and his communities of origin.

Employment and entrepreneurship provide opportunities for African-American men to have the capacity to create and sustain a home for themselves and potential families. Obtaining skilled knowledge necessary for achievement, opportunity, and practiced citizenry comes through higher levels of education. This qualitative phenomenological study was researched
through the ontological lens. This lens will allow the researcher to view the findings through the various lived experiences of the studied participants (Creswell, 2013).

**Problem Statement**

The problems addressed in this study were those of African-American males enrolled in community college but who are not continuing steadfastly towards graduation. In the United States, the poorest educational outcomes belong to African-American males (Harper, 2012; J. F. L. Jackson & Moore, 2006, 2008; Strayhorn, 2012). According to Wood and Palmer (2013) “of Black males who enter the community college, only 42.2% will have continued to the attainment of a degree within three years” (p. 2). Research studies by Bush and Bush (2005), Wood (2010), Harper (2012), Harris and Wood (2014) confirmed African-American male community college enrollees are not continuing to the completion of their academic program culminating in graduation. In 2011, the College Board released its report, *The Educational Experiences of Young Men of Color*. The report illumined six paths students chose upon graduation from high school. The six categories included: (a) entering college, (b) military enlistment, (c) obtaining employment, (d) remaining unemployed (e) entering prison, and (f) death by means other than illness or disease. Data from the report showed a gross overrepresentation of young men of color in the latter three categories (Lee & Ransom, 2010, p. 28).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore continuance to graduation for African-American males enrolled in community college. The findings in this study will serve to provide community college administrators and faculty with information necessary to provide strategies and resources to African-American males that decrease attrition
and increase graduation from community college. At this stage in the research, continuance will broadly be defined as continuous enrollment in a community college while carrying a minimum load of 12 units of credit per semester.

**Significance of the Study**

Researchers who examined degree completion rates, reported the lowest rates of degree completion among all populations belonged to African-American males (Bush & Bush, 2005; Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007; Lewis & Middleton, 2003; Wood, 2012c). Additionally, research indicators of academic benchmarks and outcomes for African-American males including high school graduation, assessment scores, and postsecondary attendance, highlight considerable achievement gaps between African-American males and males from all other demographic groups (Barbatis, 2010; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001; Harper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2008).

According to O’Bannon, Beard, and Britt (2013), the ranking of the United States when compared with other industrialized countries for adults ages 18 to 34 who have earned a college degree dropped from first to 16th. One of the results from this drop in rankings occurred in 2009 when President Obama introduced his American Graduation Initiative that included community colleges. During a speech where the President discussed the purpose of the Initiative, he indicated the focus would be upon targeted strategies and reforms to include retention and graduation rates (Obama, 2009).

Incentive for community colleges to implement the President’s American Graduation Initiative was backed with billions of dollars to aid in the reformation efforts (Obama, 2009). The funds had been provided in an exertion to reach the asserted goals of President Obama’s 2009 initiative speech. In said speech, the president stated a desired goal of the United States
was having the largest population of college graduates by the year 2020. With this initiative in place, it was likely that funding for community colleges could, in part, become based upon program completion to graduation. Therefore, an inquiry to adequately determine what nurtures and inspires African-American male enrollees towards continuance to graduation presents as imperative.

Completing community college has a global economic impact for all students including African-American males. According to a 2014 report conducted by Economic Modeling Specialists Intl. (EMS, Intl.), the skills and abilities of students are enhanced by community college. The report examined the bolstering of the U.S. economy by former students in 2012 in the amount of $806.4 billion dollars (p. 8). EMS, Int’l also stated that throughout the working career of community college students, “Society will also benefit from $46.4 billion in present value social savings related to reduced crime, lower welfare and unemployment, and increased health and well-being across the nation” (p. 8). African-American males enrolled in community college need to graduate, as they are members of this U.S. society.

**Research Questions**

Three research questions guided this phenomenological study that explored continuance to graduation from community college for African-American males. These research questions were grounded in the conceptual frameworks of Bean (1979), Tinto (1975), and Bell (1977). Bean’s theory of student attrition was a theory based on factors affecting workplace turnover. Tinto’s theory of departure examined internal and external factors leading to one’s departure from college along with indicators of what led to retention. Bell’s critical race theory (CRT; 1977) explored racism in educational institutions. The research questions provide a format through which climate and environment explorations, strategy recalibrations, resiliency
development, and resource allocations could illumine paths that lead to academic success and graduation for African-American males as told by their lived experiences. Research question one was derived from Tinto’s theory of departure. The question explored various reasons one might not continue to graduation from a community college. Question two was based upon Bean’s theory of attrition. The question explored possible roles and responsibilities of the commuter student outside of the college campus that potentially leads to attrition. Research question three looked at the climate and environment of the community college institution itself and stemmed from Bell’s critical race theory. The question explored the institutional perceptions and subsequent treatment of African-American males on the community college campus. The research questions that guided this study are:

**RQ1**: Why do some African-American males continue to graduation from a community college within three years while others do not?

**RQ2**: What do African-American males need outside the community college campus to continue to graduation?

**RQ3**: What do African-American males need on the community college campus to continue to graduation?

**Research Plan**

The current study was conducted as a phenomenological study. Phenomenological studies were derived from the fields of philosophy and psychology that examines objects of perception through the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). This phenomenological study will serve as the most appropriate approach as it can provide the epistemological, ontological, and axiological lens through which the participants illumine and explicate paths towards their own successful community college experiences.
A phenomenological study is the only unbiased research method available to understand what African-American males perceive they need to help them graduate from community colleges. This is the most suitable design as it is the only design that provides an understanding of the phenomenon through the participant’s sensory perceptions. A study of the lived experiences of the participants benefitted the researcher as an educator and administrator working at the K-12 and post-secondary education levels.

The primary setting for the study was a community college located in the southern California County of San Bernardino. All of the participants in this qualitative phenomenological study were African-American males 18 years of age or older. According to California law, the age of 18 is the minimum age a participant can volunteer for a research study without parental consent (California Legislative Information, 2015). The participants from the community college were current enrollees at the college. The total number of participants for this study was nine. According to Creswell (1998) and Morse (1995), saturation in a phenomenological study is reached when the information obtained from participants fully develops the research model.

The data collection consisted of a survey, a questionnaire, and individual interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The participants completed the survey and questionnaire electronically. NVivo software (Castleberry, 2014; Lewis, 2004) was utilized as the coding and theming software program. The phenomenological data analysis by Moustakas (1994) served as the process analyzing the data.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

The limitations of this study were that all participants who are attending a community college reside in one southern California County. The study was limited to no more than nine
participants. While there may also be students attending community college under the age of 18, they were not selected as participants for this study.

**Definitions**

1. *African American* – The term used in referring to descendants of slaves in the United States who were of African ancestry (Wood, 2012c).

2. *Attrition* – The term used to describe those dropping out of school populations (Wood, 2012a).

3. *Microaggressions* – Subtle verbal and nonverbal, including visual insults, which are directed toward persons of color (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000).

**Summary**

Chapter One focused on the background of this phenomenological study. The statements of the problem, the purpose, and the guiding research questions were specified. Intellectual basis of the researcher’s intent for insinuation in the study is offered and explicated. Additionally, the research questions directing the study were included. Lastly, the plans for conducting the research along with limitations of the study were briefly discussed.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The academic achievement gap that exists between Caucasian and African-American students in the United States has been researched and discussed for the last several decades. This gap—which is one of both achievement and opportunity—has various underlying sub-topics including patterns of failure among fourth-grade African-American students (Kunjufu, 1985), and oppositional culture (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The discussions continued to include a possible factor of lack of “male-friendly” subject matter content curricula (Gurian, 2005; Kozol, 1991; Sax, 2007; Sewell, 1998). Leary (n.d.) offered a theory of multigenerational familial and socio-historic trauma to the list of reasons for the lack of achievement among African-American males. R. Payne (2005) and Gordon and Gordon (2006) discussed the issue and pointed to race and income. Even with this past research having been conducted, remaining is an unmitigated achievement gap that continues past K-12 into community college (Rovai et al., 2007).

There have been numerous theories and accompanying models developed with cultural/linguistic, socio-economic specificity regarding educational institutions and practices. According to Rovai et al. (2007), only 49% of the African-American student population is confident they will graduate from high school with the skills necessary to achieve success in college (p. 14). They go on to discuss African-American males as only being one third of the African-American college-going population. African-American college student enrollment between 1976 and 2011 increased from 10% to 15% (Neinstein & Katzman, 2008, Trends, Ethnicity, Black). However, these percentages are still significantly lower than the 61% that reflects Caucasian college student enrollment in 2012 (p. 1). That number fell from 84% between 1976 and 2011 (p. 1).
Regarding immediate college enrollment upon high school graduation, between 1990 and 2012, Asian students have the highest college-going rate of 84%, followed by Hispanic students at 69%, Caucasian students at 67% and Black students at 62% (Cuyjet, 1997, p. 11). These statistics show a lack of education systems executing theoretical models based on disproportionalities in education institutions for African-American males (Cuyjet, 1997). The review of literature in this chapter will synthesize and evaluate past research and literature that may affect the graduation of African-American males enrolled in community college.

The literature review in this chapter begins with a discussion of the theoretical frameworks guiding this study and its findings. These frameworks include Tinto (1975), Bean (1979), and Bell (1977). These frameworks and environment are characteristics of the community college system. Next is a brief historical overview of K-12 academic achievement based on race. In order to effectively discuss factors leading to graduation at the community college level for African-American males, a glimpse into the education world leading up to enrollment in community college must be examined. Additionally, structures and sub-systems within the K-12 system affecting these students will also be discussed. Following an historical and systems review of the K-12 system will be an historical review of the community college.

Lastly, this literature review will evaluate both internal and external factors that might impact the graduation rates of the African-American males in community college. Said factors include: climate and environments, educational practices, campus student services, employment status, college assessment scores, and support. The literature review will begin with educational premises from an historical perspective. These perspectives include the philosophical basis for the formation of the K-12 and community college systems.
Theoretical Framework

There are various theoretical models that examine student continuance and the characteristics, which if not met, will lead to withdrawal. Within the literature, continuance is examined through both internal and external factors. The internal factors include those on the campus of the community college. The external factors would be those off campus, but still affecting the continuance toward graduation. These models include that of Tinto (1975), Bean (1979), and Bell (1976).

Tinto (1975) developed his theory when determining that students who did not integrate into the society of the college campus would eventually depart. Attending classes may not be enough for a student to continue to graduation from college. This integration could include activities, sports, clubs, or other campus events.

Bean’s (1979) theory of attrition was researched through the lens of an employee of an organization. He determined that employee turnover was based on job satisfaction. Bean began to carry this theory into the field of education with focus on the community college student. In this context, he researched student grades as rewards. He also discussed the issue of the community college student having external obstacles including commuting to and from campus.

Bell’s (1976) Critical Race Theory (CRT) explored the education institution through the lens of an African American. This theory originated in the 1970s to show the inequities in treatment of employees of different races in the workplace. CRT made its way into the field of education in the mid-1990s exposing the differences in treatment of Caucasian and minority students (Leonardo, 2012). The treatment of students would include in the classroom in the provision of services.
Theory of Departure

Spady (1970) was first to introduce the theory of departure. He developed the model based on a synthesis of literature about student dropouts. The basic premise of the model was derived from Emil Durkheim’s (as cited in Spady, 1970) theory of suicide. Durkheim’s theory associated the degree to which one is integrated into society or social group with their desire to remain or withdraw. It is the strength of an individual’s bond to society and stability therein that measures degrees of integration according to Durkheim.

College was viewed by Spady (1970) as an intrinsically rewarding social system with one of those rewards being a student’s intellectual development. According to Spady, it is the level of integration developed by the student within the college environment that impacts the dropout process. The extrinsic rewards offered by the college include grades, while intellectual development serves as an intrinsic reward of the social system. When students may find themselves integrating into the social system of college, this might represent the establishment of relationship building within the college community. Also inculcating increased levels of desire for intellectual development decreases likelihood of attrition.

Tinto (1975) developed his theory based on Spady’s (1970) theory of the student departure process. An important factor for success in postsecondary education is student retention (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Longitudinal models developed to analyze factors leading to departure from community college are the basis of this theoretical framework. According to Tinto, key attributes leading to a student being integrated in the community college environment include the search for knowledge, support, campus involvement, commitment, and internal motivation. According to Tinto’s model, the less involved a student feels through internal or
external factors as they relate to the college-going experience, the greater the likelihood for withdrawal from college.

Tinto (1975) expanded on Spady’s (1970) theory by distinguishing between those students who might engage in the college transferring process from those who simply drop out. According to Tinto, colleges fail to properly define dropout, and this failure “can significantly impact questions of policy in higher education” (p. 90). Tinto also expanded his model of student departure from that of Spady’s by including not only community college and four-year college and university programs, but also educational goal attainment. Tinto included bachelor, masters, and doctoral program commitments. Additionally, he included specific attributes that might lead a student to choose one institution over another. These attributes include family support and influence to attend, cost, career goals, and institution type.

In a later revision of this theory, Tinto (1993) included additional characteristics. Those characteristics included financial resources and the external commitment to family, community, and employment. Tinto felt these additional factors influenced departure. While Tinto asserted that his theory sought to provide an explanation of a student’s departure from college or university, the theory was not meant to determine one’s departure from a system in general.

**Student Attrition Theory**

There are several causes leading to student pre-graduation departure that were developed by Bean (1979) in his theory of student attrition. Bean asserted that departure decisions by a student would develop over the course of time. The final decision to depart by a student would be caused by his inability to fit in the campus culture socially, academically, economically, or possibly even spiritually. Bean began to develop his theory in 1979. He looked at Spady’s (1970) and Tinto’s (1975, 1993) theories and felt they were lacking. He gave this description of
those theories based on determining that major factors of attrition were not being researched and discussed in Spady’s or Tinto’s theoretical models. Bean also felt there were variables of student attrition that correlated with student demographics that were not addressed in the theories. Therefore, Bean contended it was very difficult to conclude the significance of what those two theories measured.

Based upon the criticisms of Tinto (1975, 1993) and Spady (1970), Bean (1979) developed a model of student attrition. In his model, he utilized an adaptation from previous studies on work turnover in organizations by Price (1977). Bean’s (1980) causal model included four categories of variables developed through research, which included the dependent variable of dropout and intervening variables of satisfaction, institutional commitment, and organizational determinants along with background variables. The background variables would be described by Bean as those characteristics possessed by the student prior to entering college. Bean’s (1980) model asserted that these background characteristics would become the major influence in the student’s ability to interact within the campus environment.

Bean (1979) would revise his model of student attrition in 1982 to exclude the background variables. According to Bean (1982), the background variables did not make a significant contribution to the varying factors leading to students dropping out. Bean felt that the most significant factor leading to dropout was the intent of a student to withdrawal from the education institution. He asserted that the student had every intention to leave but would use other variables as possible reasons for departure.

**Critical Race Theory**

According to Patton, McEwen, Rendon and Howard-Hamilton (2007), African-American, Asian-American, and Hispanic-American legal scholars developed Critical Race
Theory (CRT). Their focus was on better comprehending issues in society including the law and race along with what seemed as the failing civil rights legislation. In the late 1970s, Scholar and Professor Derrick Bell (1976) authored the essay, *Serving Two Masters: Integration Ideals and Client Interests in School Desegregation*. In this essay, Bell criticized the accuracy of the enforcement stemming from the U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*. In his writing, he also brought into question how the rolling out of the desegregation of schools truly led to bringing about equality in education.

According to Walker (2010), it was critical race theorists who began to assert that a contributing factor leading to the problems faced by African-American male students enrolled in schools across the U.S. was institutionalized racism. While the processes revealing institutionalized racism were challenging to observe, the issue was complex. CRT was bringing awareness to the daily experiences African-American males were facing in school, as they would provide narratives of marginalization and being excluded in school. These experiences according to Payne (2010) included unfair discipline practices based upon gender and race and was illegal.

Ladson-Billings (1998) discussed how CRT would continue to make its presence in the field of education at the post-secondary levels for both faculty and students. According to Ladson-Billings (as cited in Cleveland, 2004), only 4.5% of professors in the U.S. were African American 20 years after Affirmative Action (p. 81). Additionally, in 1991, of the 24,721 doctoral degrees given to citizens along with non-citizens who chose to remain in the U.S. after receiving their degree, only 3.8% or 933 of those awardees were African American (Hacker, 1991, as cited in Cleveland, 2004, p. 81).

Master scripting silences multiple voices and perspectives, primarily legitimizing dominant, white, upper-class male voicing’s as the ‘standard’ knowledge students need to know. All other accounts and perspectives are omitted from the master script unless they can be disempowered through misrepresentation. Thus, content that does not reflect the dominant voice must be brought under control, mastered, and then reshaped before it can become a part of the master script (p. 342). (p. 21)

Critical Race Theory from a postsecondary education perspective shows discriminatory practices thus diminishing the cultural values of minorities (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004; Taylor, 1998). When focusing on enrollment and admission practices at University of Michigan, Solorzano and Ornelas (2004) found if a parent of an applicant was an alumnus of the school, the applicant received additional points toward admission. As the university has fewer alumni who are parents of students of color, Solorzano and Ornelas proposed this as a racist practice as the chances for African-American students to gain admission were decreased while those of Caucasian students were increased.

Also taken into consideration was the strength of the high school the applicant attended. Strength in this context referred to Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses as the successful completion of these courses may boost the overall Grade Point Average (GPA) of a student. According to the 2010 Schott Foundation report, African-American students are not gaining admission to these high rigor courses in high school at nearly the same rate as their Caucasian counterparts (Holzman, 2010). For those attending schools in low-income urban areas, their schools may not offer AP or IB courses. University of Michigan views schools
without AP or IB courses as less rigorous. Again, African-American students were penalized and admissions denied. This weighs in as a factor possibly impeding the graduation of African-American males. These factors are not only currently occurring, but have been for many decades in the K-12 of this country.

**Related Literature**

**Historical Overview**

In 1953, there was a legal ruling intended to create opportunities for African-American children to obtain equal access to a free and appropriate public school education. In the landmark decision by the United States Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the high court overturned *Plessey v Ferguson* ruling of 1896 that allowed racially separated public schools, that schools should no longer be segregated (Skiba et al., 2011, p. 85). The ruling struck down the notion of separate and equal education as structurally unequal. *De jure* segregation was henceforth in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment of the Constitution. The ruling ostensibly aimed to move the nation towards more equal public school opportunities for African-American children.

One decade later in 1964, Title VI was included in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In preparation for the enactment of Title VI, President John F. Kennedy defined *simple justice*, as funds collected by a colorblind tax collector ought not to be spent in the support of separated services. This now meant one could not be discriminated against based on race, color, or national origin (Skiba et al., 2011, pp. 85-86). The public school system in the United States would become integrated with African-American and Caucasian students attending school together. The enactment, however, did not mean that the quality of education would become equal. Currently, schools with higher percentages of African-American student populations do
not receive the same level of rigor or expectations, funding, or preparation for post secondary opportunities, as do their counterparts in primarily Caucasian schools (Horsford, 2009).

Responses from the nine school district superintendents interviewed in the Horsford (2009) article revealed similar views. In the article, the superintendents attended both segregated and desegregated schools as children. The quiet but steady move toward school resegregation was discussed in the article. The move was supported by way of student discipline, academic tracking, and a lack of financial and socio-emotional resources in schools. Additionally, the article addressed the lack of culturally responsive faculty and staff representation at schools predominantly attended by students of color. According to the article, superintendents also noted childhood notions of feeling safe and nurtured while learning in their pre *Brown v. Board of Education* segregated schools.

According to Vallas (2009) in 1972, the *Mills v. Board of Education U.S. Supreme Court* case resulted in the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA). This was later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). This act mandated all schools in the United States to ensure all school-aged children received a free and appropriate education. These rulings from the nation’s highest court began a process to equalize resources, along with access to those resources, and proper treatment of African-American children in schools. However, some of these processes have not completely materialized. U.S. public schools are dramatically more segregated today than they were 40 years ago. Some might perceive that student academic achievement might be regressing rather than progressing and furthermore might postulate that a goal might be the creation of a permanent underclass. The question remains, “Was integration a viable solution for inequities in education in the first place?” Some
say the focus ought to be on closing the achievement/opportunity gap rather than integrating the institution.

**Systemic Failures of K-12 Schools**

The failure of the K-12 school system to provide an acceptable education including the care and treatment of African-American male students has been well documented in research (Ellis, 2014; Hampton, 2002; Harper, 2005; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Gibson, Harris, Mick, & Burkhalter, 2009; Kunjufu, 2010; Patton, 2002; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). This research reported the different obstacles African-American males must navigate through as a result of the systems within schools failing them. These include the school-to-prison pipeline, disproportionate suspensions and expulsions, misclassifications into special education programs, thwarted from or not provided opportunities to enroll in advanced placement or honors courses, and a lack of cultural proficient teaching.

According to Holzman (2011), classes with opportunities such as Advanced Placement (AP) and honors classes provide educational enrichment that are often inaccessible to the African-American male students. The article also illumines the common misidentification and misclassifications of African-American males leading to accompanying inappropriate placements and overrepresentation in special education programs. According to Oakes, Ormseth, Bell, and Camp (1990), this misclassification along with tracking is not unintentional. According to the article, tracking begins in elementary school when students who are perceived as under educable are enrolled in remedial courses or placed with other perceived deficient learners. Furthermore, Oakes et al. stated, at the senior high school level, judgments about students’ ability influence decisions about curriculum track enrollment—whether students [get to] take college–preparatory,
general, or vocational courses of study. Track enrollment, in turn, is critical in course
taking and achievement (Lee, 1986; Lee and Bryk, 1988; Rock et al., 1984, 1985).
(p. 17).

Another area of systemic failure in the K-12 school system may be attributed to the lack
of ethnic and linguistic diversity among teachers, especially African-American teachers.
Misperceptions of African-American males can often be attributed to hegemonic assumptions
and cultural dissonance between the educational community and the community of origin from
which the Black male students hail. In public schools across America, it is easy to notice there
are more Caucasian teachers than African-American teachers. Hegemony is where a dominant
culture presumes that its worldview is or ought to be the yardstick by which all human
experiences are to be measured. Within such a worldview resides an incapacity to understand
the epistemological realities of African-American students so states the Skiba et al. (2011) study
in which “Townsend (2000) suggested that the unfamiliarity of White teachers with the
interactional patterns that characterize many African-American males may cause these teachers
to interpret impassioned or emotive interactions as combative or argumentative” (p. 87).

In Peterek-Bonner’s (2009) article, a Caucasian female teacher recalls her feelings after a
negative incident with an African-American male student in her class. In the article she stated, “I
believe now that the incident confirmed my underlying beliefs about African-American males
that had been shaped by media, history, and ignorance, and that I was operating within an
inherently racist system to which I silently conformed” (p. 64). The perspective of this teacher
shows how she formed an opinion from external and internal sources. It also gives a perspective
of how an educator might develop a bias toward African-American males.
At a 2010 historically Black colleges and universities symposium, U.S. Secretary Arne Duncan addressed the African-American male teacher shortage issue. According to the Graham and Erwin’s (2011) article of the nation’s 3.2 million teachers, less than 2% were African-American males (p. 402). Additionally, on average, roughly 300,000 new teachers are hired a year in America. However, according to the article, only about 4,500 of them are Black males (p. 402). These statistics result in approximately 1 in 50 teachers in the United States being an African-American male according to Graham and Erwin (p. 398). For African-American males, at the grade school level, not seeing themselves represented in the classroom or in the school administration may not provide visual realization or motivation to enter the occupation. In the absence of such models, the young Black male students struggle to formulate transferable images of life possibilities...

In his article, Nicolas (2014) discussed the lack of African-American males in the classroom. Nicolas, an African-American male educator talks about African-American males being represented as custodians, cafeteria, and transport employees. He furthers if an African-American male is in a teaching position, it is often in a physical education or coaching position. According to Nicolas (2014), African-American males make up roughly 2% of the teaching population in the United States (para. 3).

According to a phenomenological study conducted by Graham and Erwin (2011), there were several reasons African-American males gave for not entering the teaching profession. The men who participated in the study noted: 1) low salary, and 2) that teaching was not an especially male-identified profession. Here, they expressed concern about being perceived as potentially pedophilic, effeminate, or homosexual rounded out the top reasons for Black males to not select the teaching profession.
Ferguson (2001), Holtzman (2011), and Jordan (2008) addressed the issue of school discipline. They reported that African-American males are disciplined at a significantly higher and more severe rate than that of their Caucasian male counterparts. According to Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, and Bachman (2008), Caucasian students are given referrals to the school office for discipline due to specific reasons such as vandalism or smoking. However, for African-American males, they receive referrals for subjective reasons, such as perceived threats or disrespect. This study also concluded that numerous referrals of African-American male students led to disproportionate preponderances of suspensions and expulsions of African-American males. Recirculating suspensions and expulsions jeopardizes African-Americans males towards pre-graduation departures from school.

According to Brownstein (2010), there is a direct correlation between the dropout rate and student suspensions and expulsions. According to Lewis, Simon, Uzzel, Horwitz, and Casserly (2010), while Caucasian males made up 5% of the high school dropout population across the United States, the rate for African-American males was almost double at 9% (p. 66). For the African-American male subjected to an exorbitant amount of time out of school versus students of any other ethnicity, juvenile justice contact rather than high school graduation becomes the more inevitable reality.

enrollment, constituted approximately 32% of those suspended from school.” The report indicated that males of color were disproportionately affected by zero tolerance policies. (p. 12).

Rocque and Paternoster (2011) used the phrase school-to-prison pipeline when discussing the student who involuntarily leaves the K-12 system and enters the prison system. Rocque and Paternoster asserted that the conduit that exists as the school-to-prison pipeline has its foundation in the K-12 school discipline structure.

This structure results in a disproportionate number of African-American males being suspended and expelled from school. These discipline measures result in moving directly from the classroom to the jail cell. According to Brownstein (2010), schoolteachers and administrators who formerly contacted parents regarding disciplinary issues with students are now required to contact law enforcement for those same offenses. This can result in criminalization versus counsel and close, after school detention, or other school-home based measures.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan (ACLU, 2009), African-American students leaving school are more likely to commit criminal offenses. The ACLU attributed the school-to-prison pipeline African-American and other students face as the following: (a) the lack of access to a quality education, (b) the limited educational opportunities in schools due to institutional practices (equal access to Advanced Placement and Honors courses), and (c) criminalizing students who lose their education opportunities. The ACLU went on to identify these issues as one of cultural dissonance in dealing with African-American students. According to Payne (2010), the education system in the United States prepares African-American males to enter the prison system more than preparing them to enter college or the labor market. He went on to discuss one of the reasons for this as African-American males
give the perception of learning reluctant and compliance resistant when they are in fact relationally and structurally disengaged within an often-times hostile school environment.

Once the criminal justice system becomes involved, African-American males continue to experience compounding and confounding problems. According to Hart Research Associates (2011), there is an adverse affect on African-American communities as a result of the unequal treatment of African Americans in the United States’ juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. The report went on to name inequities to include police racial profiling, and harsher sentencing than those of other ethnicities, i.e., mandatory, harsher sentencing for possession of crack associated with Blacks than powder cocaine associated with Whites.

Community colleges may not consider the aforementioned student realities when attempting to educate, provide services, and retain African-American males. The African-American male arrives at the community college with the sum total of his schooling experiences. Hence, even if successfully managing to enroll in classes, achieving success in community college might be filtered through negative experiences and abridge new presenting opportunities.

**History of the Community College**

In the mid-1800s, junior colleges were proposed as an opportunity to relieve universities of the responsibility of providing general education to high school graduates (Jurgens, 2010). According to Jurgens (2010), these proposals were developed by Henry Tappan, president of the University of Michigan, University of Georgia trustee William Mitchell, and president of University of Minnesota’s William Fowell (p. 18). It was their belief that preparing students for upper-level college coursework through lower division courses could possibly hinder four-year universities in reaching the level of maturity required for the high level of academic rigor the university was seeking.
Later in the 1800s, other universities would begin advocating for the higher education system in the United States. This was done to more closely resemble the European model of post-secondary education. The end result would be that universities in the United States would offer courses with higher levels of rigor and junior colleges would focus on technical and vocational training along with lower-level education courses (Jurgens, 2010).

Higher education gained one of its greatest innovations in the 20th century with the start of the American community college according to Witt, Wattenbarger, Gollattscheck, and Suppiger (1994). Once referred to as junior colleges, many of these post-secondary institutions are now referred to as community colleges. Junior colleges began their existence, as the necessity for a skilled workforce became a growing need in the United States. Secondly, while individuals realized the need to obtain employment skills during this time, two-thirds of high school graduates were unwilling to move away from home to pursue a college education (Jurgens, 2010).

According to Townsend (2001), the initial creation of the public junior college in 1901 had a central mission of providing transferrable education to the four-year college. Additionally, Townsend made reference to studies that indicated the likelihood that a student who obtained an associate’s degree would graduate from a four-year institution. He asserted this likelihood was greater than the student who transferred without an associate’s degree.

Townsend (2001) also discussed the need for a community college system that includes professional development support of teachers and administrators to better serve students; especially African-American males on campus. Without support from teachers, staff, and administrators, students might be less likely to earn a degree or certificate. For those African-American males who have the desire to move into employment requiring a degree from a
community college or for those desiring to transfer to a four-year university, this opportunity may cease to exist.

Regarding the opportunity to transfer from the community college to the four-year institution, Cooley (2000 as cited in Townsend, 2001) noted an additional program for students. This program would allow students who transferred from the community college to the four-year college or university the opportunity to transfer back to the community college. The rationale was based upon the ability of the community college environment to provide more attention to their students.

Those critical of the educational practices within community colleges feel these institutions lack academic rigor and students are not motivated to learn (Carlan, 2001). The lack of rigor and motivation might serve as the rationale for low graduation rates for African-American males. According to Sutherland (1986), the four-year institution did not provide as nurturing an environment as the community college and required students on campuses to show more self-motivation and commitment to their education.

According to the American Association of Community Colleges’ (AACC) 2014 Fact Sheet, community colleges have an “open-access model and low tuition rates” (p. 1). Furthermore, the AACC Fact Sheets stated, “whether a student’s goal is to transfer to a 4-year institution or to immediately join the workforce, community colleges can provide the preparation, training, and services that are needed for success” (p. 1). The open-access model and lower tuition rates can serve as major reasons high school graduates choose the path of the community college to begin their post-secondary education.

On the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) website, the site describes its system. The brief description states,
The California Community Colleges is the largest system of higher education in the nation, with 2.1 million students attending 113 colleges [serving more than 2.76 million students]. Our colleges provide students with the knowledge and background necessary to compete in today’s economy. With a wide range of educational offerings, the colleges provide workforce training, basic courses in English and math, certificate and degree programs and preparation for transfer to four-year institutions. (2016, Welcome to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, para. 1).

The establishment of California community colleges began in 1913 and the 113th community college in the State was established in 1999.

The current tuition cost for a California resident attending one of the 113 California community colleges is $46.00 per unit (Caspian Services, 2011, para. 2). This means a student can complete a 12-unit semester at a California community college for $552.00. The total spent on tuition for completing a community college education could be as low as $2,760.00. This would mean the student completed 60 units of credit. However, if a student is completing remedial courses or other prerequisite courses not counting toward a degree, the cost could be higher.

In March 2015, a unique agreement was finalized between the California Community Colleges’ Chancellor’s Office and nine Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) that can benefit the African-American male student. Should students meet the requirements set forth by the nine HBCUs, these institutions will guarantee admission. The nine HBCU institutions include: Bennett College, Dillard University, Fisk University, Lincoln University of Missouri, Philander Smith College, Stillman College, Talladega College, Tuskegee University, and Wiley University. The academic requirements for transfer to one of the agreed upon
colleges and universities are the same a student would need to meet in order to transfer to a California State University (CSU) or University of California (UC) institution (California Community Colleges, 2015).

**Environments**

For the African-American male student faced with objectification and marginalization in and around the college campus, finding ways to achieve success in the classroom can become difficult at best. Attending college for the African-American male student may present challenges both visible and invisible to the naked eye. The environmental factors faced in college can contribute or impede graduation. The first and most important factor on a college campus is the school itself.

According to the American Association of Community Colleges 2014 Fact Sheet, there are a total of 1,132 community colleges in the United States (p. 1). Additionally, according to the HBCUCONNECT.com, there are only 12 historically Black community colleges in the United States. In 2014, *U.S. News and World Report* ranked the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). In their rankings, there were 80 HBCUs on the list after removing the 12 community colleges. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2013 cited in Clark, 2014), in the 2010-2011 school year there were 2,870 postsecondary Title IV institutions (p. 9).

One of the retention/attrition factors in an institution of higher learning is the structure and familiarity of the college class. For the high school graduate attending college for the first time, being in a college classroom may present culture shock. In a study by Yeager and Walton (2011), students observed videos of upperclassman describing their college experience to first-year college students who attributed their first-year poor grades, in part, to being unfamiliar with
college-class structures. For those participating in the study, not only were their first-year GPAs higher than others who had not viewed the videos, their grades continued to rise in subsequent terms.

Dealing with the environments in and around a community college campus can put a strain on any student; including the African-American male. The campus and contiguous community, classes can play roles in shaping the success in college for this population. It can evoke frustration leading to departure. Once students make the decision to attend a community college, the nuances faced on campus may bring success or missed opportunities. According to Bush and Bush (2005), the community college might be the only opportunity an African-American male has to attend college.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, Title IV was part of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson (Federal Student Aid, 1965, p. 2). A Title IV postsecondary institution is one meeting the eligibility requirements outlined in the HEA thus making the institution eligible to award federal financial aid to eligible students. Financial aid can be awarded to eligible students in the form of grants, loans, and Federal Work Study. For African-American students, having only 12 community colleges and 80 four-year college and universities that are predominately attended by African-American students, may present an environmental obstacle one is unable to successfully navigate to achieve graduation.

Smith et al. (2007) described the oppression and discrimination African-Americans and other minority students encounter during their college experiences while attending predominately Caucasian institutions of higher learning as enduring racial battle fatigue. According to this
study, factors including African-American representation in the student and faculty bodies show patterns of exclusion due to race and policies set forth by institutional governing bodies.

A recent example of the racial battle fatigue as described by Smith et al. (2007) took place at the University of Virginia (UVA) located in Charlottesville. According to the Associated Press (AP), Martese Johnson, a 20-year-old African-American male attending UVA was beaten while being arrested by Alcohol Board Control officers outside of a bar in Charlottesville. The role of the ABC is to enforce alcohol laws and the officers confronted Johnson when he tried to enter the bar. In this incident, according to the AP, Johnson was not intoxicated, identified himself as a UVA student, and was in possession of his university identification card.

On March 8, 2015, a video aired on news outlets across the United States including CNN. The video showed students who were part of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity chapter on the campus of Oklahoma University (OU). According to the CNN report, the students in the video were singing a song which had the lyrics of lynching and excluding N@#$%^%& from ever being a part of the fraternity. Also in the CNN report, OU students including Chelsey Davis, co-founder of the OU African-American campus student group Unheard, stated African-American students attending OU were not shocked by the fraternity members’ song, they were more surprised these actions were finally caught on tape.

The school environment in the area of creating meaningful relationships may also be critical to the graduation of a student. According to Meeuwisse, Severiens, and Born (2010), the learning environment provides a sense of belonging and can help students not only integrate, but also achieve at a higher rate. Their research noted that for minority students in a more activating
learning environment, higher quality relationships with teachers developed. Additionally, there was a positive influence on collaboration among students in the area of group work.

**Educational Practices**

Educational practices may not only be noticed, but can be internalized by students while in their K-12 school years. With an average school day of 6 hours and a school year lasting nearly 190 days, one year of attending school can account for up to or more than 1,140 hours in the life of a child. When compared to the 2,920 hours of sleep a child may get if sleeping 8 hours per day each of the 365 days in a year, the time spent in school can be significant. It would not be a far reach to believe that the educational practices of faculty and staff in the K-12 system might have an impact on the success of the African-American male student attending a community college.

In the 2003-2005 study conducted by Lynn, Bacon, Totton, Bridges, and Jennings (2010), the researchers conducted a focus group and conducted interviews with teachers. The setting was a low-achieving school in an African-American suburban community. In question, were the reasons teachers felt African-American students were underachieving, but more specifically, why the Black male students were not reaching the same levels of academic achievement of their Caucasian counterparts. According to the study, the responses of the participants were varied. However, the study noted very few teachers who participated in the study felt responsible for the low achievement of students in their classes (p. 307). Additionally, when asked specifically about the achievement of African-American male students, the study stated hostility was shown by a few of the teacher participants (p. 307).

The data from this study also suggested that the teachers felt the students themselves were at fault for their lack of achievement due to being learning reluctant, or demonstrated low
levels of interest in the learning process. Should these students successfully navigate through the K-12 system despite their perceived lack of motivation or interest in learning, their next education environment may well become a community college.

Educational practices on community college campuses can assist a student to achieve desired graduation; however, if those practices are not positive or equal for all students, including African-American males, graduation may not occur. In their 2007 book, *Closing the African American Achievement Gap in Higher Education*, Rovai et al. further discussed factors resulting from educational practices on college campuses. Identified negative practices include having low expectations of African-American students, racial stereotyping, cultural isolation, and low-level faculty support. One named solution is an operationalized practice of inclusion of diverse learners through campus administration and departments in addition to classrooms.

Just as the high school counselor may play a significant role in a student graduating from high school, the community college advisor or counselor has the same mandate of responsibility. According to the discussion of transition to college in the book, *From High School to College, Improving Opportunities for Success in Postsecondary Education*, Kirst, Antonio, and Bueschel (2004) discussed the role of the college advisor. According to Bueschel, students in the study indicated shortfalls in departments staffing. They also thought routine student-advisor meetings should be required.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) asserted that instead of creating a pathway toward a four-year institution to complete a baccalaureate degree, the community colleges merely steer students toward an associate degree or technical education certificate. Additionally, they state that community colleges continue to perpetuate class stratification as ethnic minorities and those from lower socioeconomic statuses have fewer opportunities to receive the resources necessary
to transfer and complete a four-year degree. Those resources may not be only financial, but also include the academic development needed to successfully complete the rigors of the four-year institution.

Learning climate can set the foundation for success or lack thereof. Dunn et al. (2009) studied colleges where faculty administered instruments to determine the learning style of students. Additionally, they also studied institutions of higher learning that created courses for graduate- and doctoral-level students that integrated instruction about learning styles. These courses were required as part of the degree plans for the graduate level students. Dunn et al. found that students who knew their learning style when completing courses with teachers who also received professional development on understanding and instructing using various learning styles of their students had higher levels of self-awareness. These students also felt their study skills had improved. For graduate-level students who enrolled in courses with learning-style based instruction and assignments, students were able to choose those courses that best met their learning style and better integrated with their peers of similar learning proclivities.

Providing more structured offerings for incoming freshman at the inception of their community college career may also have a positive impact on graduation. According to Scott-Clayton (2011), the City University of New York (CUNY) was completely transforming their campus programs. As of 2012, incoming students were not only required to attend school on a full-time basis, the CUNY community college system would offer 10 to 12 programs that would be directly articulated with the CUNY four-year institutions (p. 21). Students would choose a program upon entry and while the options might be limited, the structure offered beneficial structure for student graduation.
The Scott-Clayton (2011) study not only pointed to structures that may bring success to community college students, it also discussed strategies. One of the strategies noted in the study that may improve student outcomes on community college campuses was strengthening the academic advising departments. According to Scott-Clayton, most campuses do not have the resources to increase the staffing in these offices. However, students who are the most at-risk for completing their community college education would be the very populations that would most benefit by increasing the staffing and level of intensity in advising offices.

Educational practices including changes to programs, faculty professional development in the area of learning styles, advising, and teacher perceptions can impact student success. Community colleges can determine structures and strategies that will work for their student populations. In the end, whatever is implemented, should become a practice that will be analyzed for its effectiveness for all populations of students including African-American males.

**Campus Student Services**

Student services on college campuses range from academic to financial, legal, and health related. While the service offerings are many, it is the perceptions of those services by the student body that determines if and how often they are utilized (Rotimi, el-Dean, Freeman, & Lee, 1986). Provider capabilities, service quality, and level of creditability of information from the service provider are the perceptions students focus on according to Athiyaman (1997) and Oldfield and Baron (2000).

In the Kelley-Hall (2010) study that assessed student perceptions of various campus student support services on college campuses in the United States, while students showed positive attitudes toward career and academic service offices, diversity programs along with health services drew more negative perceptions. Moreover, Kelley-Hall noted the relationship
between the perceptions of student services and peer support on campus. This relationship connection could have been due in part because peer groups on campus shared information regarding the various student support services on campuses.

While students attending four-year institutions may choose to live off campus, many community colleges may not have dormitories. This means that community college attendees are commuter students, coming to campus but residing off campus. Community colleges offer student support services in many of the same areas as a four-year institution. Students can find counseling, financial aid, health, and other support service programs on their campus. According to Hintz (2011), commuter students do not feel connected to the campus and in some ways feel marginalized. Hintz went on to state that the use of campus services for the commuter students is most often to fulfill the basic needs not met within their place of residence. These needs may include health care, housing resources, and food. These resources bring a sense of wellness to the student and provide the capacity to improve the mind, body, and spirit of the student (Smith, Myers, & Hensley, 2002). Unfortunately, the community college may not be able to provide these resources due to the differences in funding between two- and four-year colleges. Also adding to this might be post-secondary institution budget cuts that have occurred thus cutting staff and programs.

**Employment Status**

Maintaining a high level of global marketplace competitiveness is slipping from the United States because of waning educational attainment among young adults (Palmer, Davis, Moore, Hilton, 2010). According to Callan (2006) and Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, and Garza (2006), the United States was at one time leading the way in the number of students enrolled in
and completing a postsecondary education. One of the means to regain a premier position for educational attainment may very well come from the community colleges in the U.S.

While the opportunities resulting from community college attendance are many, completing said education has its challenges. According to Horn, Nevill, and Griffith (2006), the community college offers a greater number of opportunities to a larger population of traditional and non-traditional students including minority students. Lower-cost tuition at the community college level is more appealing and affordable for the lower income student who wants to further their education, and the community college may be the first, if not only, choice to complete that personal goal.

However, for the student who must work while attending school, gaining an edge both educationally and financially may become difficult. For the low-income student, work may not be an option. However, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ 2011 report College Enrollment and Work Activity of 2011 High School Graduates while about 85% of students enrolled in college full-time, those students participated in the labor force at a significantly lower rate than those who attended on a part-time basis (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012, All Youth Enrolled in High School or College, para. 2). This statistic can have a rippling effect on graduation from the community college.

Community colleges that meet Title IV eligibility to award federal financial aid, do so through the results of the student-completed Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Should students meet the qualifications along with household income guidelines, federal financial aid is available. Even in the State of California where tuition is considerably lower at community colleges than that of other states, the cost may be out of reach for the low-income and working class student and family.
According to Goldrick-Rab (2007), students may exhaust their awarded financial aid on living expenses after paying for tuition, fees, and books. These living expenses may include rent, transportation to and from school, and food. With new laws going into effect regarding financial aid, some students may not complete their community college education before draining their share of the federal financial aid pot of funding. For the working African-American males who might find themselves unemployed or underemployed while attending a community college, they have to rely on financial aid in order to remain enrolled in school.

According to O’Sullivan, Mugglestone, and Allison (2014), the unemployment rate for African-American males between 18 and 34 years old was 16.6% (p. 4). This percentage is considerably more than twice that of Caucasian males in the same age group at 7.1% (p. 4). According to U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.) statistics, African-American males do not close the employment gap through educational attainment at the same rate of Caucasian males.

The employment probability rate for Caucasian males earning an AA degree is 3.1% and for African-American males is 6.1% (O’Sullivan et al., 2014, p. 9). African-American males begin to close the gap after earning a baccalaureate degree as the rate decreases to 4.4% (p. 9). However, it is not until they earn a professional degree that the employment probability rate decreases to 3.2% (O’Sullivan et al., 2014, p. 9). At the professional level, the Caucasian male employment probability rate is 1.3% (O’Sullivan et al., 2015, p. 9).

**College Assessment Scores**

Four-year college and universities have some type of process whereby most students must apply and receive a letter of acceptance to the institution. However, gaining entrance to the community college is, on most campuses, a nonselective process. Anyone desiring to attend a community college does not have to produce Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or scores from the
American College Testing (ACT) corporation. However, just as in four-year institutions, community college students must complete a placement test prior to enrolling in many courses.

The assessment test measures math, writing, and may include a reading component. According to Scott-Clayton (2012), up to 92% of community colleges administer some type of placement exam (p. 1). From the results of these exams, it is determined if a student will have to enroll in remedial education courses in math and possibly English prior to being able to complete courses that will award college-level credit.

According to Primary Research Group (2008 as cited in Scott-Clayton, 2012), the two community college placement exams most widely utilized nationally are: the College Board created test ACCUPLACER® is administered in 62% of community colleges while 46% use the COMPASS® exam developed by ACT, Inc. with some schools mixing the two assessments (p. 2). According to Scott-Clayton (2012), some community colleges will assess SAT or ACT scores if completed by the student prior to enrollment (p. 9). However, many students who realize they will attend a community college upon graduation from high school will not take those exams.

The majority of students who take community college placement assessments are placed in at least one remedial course. A study conducted by Bailey, Jeong, and Cho (2010) reviewed the assessment exam results at 57 U.S. community colleges. The results of the study found 33% of the over 250,000 students whose scores were collected in the data, were placed in a remedial English course; the percentage of students placed in a remedial math course was 59% (p. 45).

Depending on the community college, a student may be prohibited to enroll in certain college-level, credit earning courses until these remediation requirements are completed.
Consequently, if a student has more than one remediation demand—particularly in English and math—his/her time needed to complete a degree will be protracted.

For the African-American student enrolled in a California community college, they may be placed in remedial education courses at a significantly higher rate than Caucasian students (Finkelstein & Fong, 2008). This inherently means that completing what is labeled a two-year college program may take considerably longer. Not being able to envision themselves receiving the true benefit of attending college as shown by a college-level Grade Point Average (GPA), may become a factor leading to premature college departure as asserted by Bean (1979).

**Support Systems**

Having some type of support system while attending college may serve as a critical factor in achieving graduation. That support system or individual may be a relative, friend, or significant person in the life of the student. According to Davis, Kilburn, and Schultz (2009), in 2005 mothers of African-American children are twice as likely as Caucasian mothers to not have any education beyond high school (p. 14). Given this fact, there is not much chance these parents will have the understanding of the community college system. Moreover, they most likely lack the capacity to assist with college-level homework assignments. This means, many African-American males will have to seek educational support outside of their home.

Support for the African-American male student attending a community college may come through a person or program on the college campus. According to Owens, Lacey, Rawls, and Holbert-Quince (2010), while 27% of high school graduates in the United States are first-generation college students (neither parent ever attended college), African-American students present to college less prepared (p. 7). The study further asserted that African-American males especially need to connect to the college environment.
One of the relationships possibly established between a community college student and another individual in the life of the student is that of a mentor. Mertz (2004) discussed mentoring through the use of Erikson’s (1994) theory of life span development. In her discussion, she explained the process of the mentor bringing out the potential of the mentee to the point that the mentee may move beyond the development of the mentor. In the Mertz (2004) article, she explicated that race and gender may serve as commonalities in a mentoring relationship. She further explained race and gender were left out of her model intentionally as they are not “inherent to the mentoring relationship” (p. 557).

For African-American males experiencing challenges navigating the internal and external nuances of being a student enrolled in community college, gaining a mentor may prove to be deciding factors in experiencing graduation. Chosen as a primary strategy for helping African-American males achieve graduation, mentoring has been discussed in studies at various institutions of higher learning as having a positive impact (Brock et al., 2010).

**Summary**

The gap in the research pointing to success factors for African-American males enrolled in community college was presented in this overview. The current and past challenges, concerns, and issues from the K-12 system, college campus environment, campus and classroom practices, along with the overall support of the African-American male student from a culturally responsive standpoint illumine their obstacles which make graduation from community college challenging (Mosby, Esters, Robinson, & Beckles, 2009 as cited in Umoja Scholars Summer Task Force). According to McKinney (2010) and Burdman (2012), the community college, entrance-assessment exam is in dire need of overhauling. This is in part due to the inability of the exams to accurately assess the academic ability of incoming students.
According to Rovai et al. (2007), students who are attending HBCUs are graduating at a higher rate than African-American students attending predominately Caucasian universities. Currently, there are no widespread practices of attempting retention of students in community colleges via provisions of self-identified relevant resources and support. According to McKinney (2010), the models in research that prove increased retention and success for African-American males should be implemented. Along with these models, implementing resources and systems based upon the lived experiences of African-American males may prove the most beneficial method to assist them in achieving success.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This chapter is a presentation of the procedures, research design, and analysis for the present research study. This qualitative phenomenological study explored continuance to community college graduation for African-American males. The data collected was from the lived experiences of the participants in the study, all of whom attended the same community college.

The research method and procedures will be discussed in this Chapter. This Chapter will also include the research questions. Additionally, information regarding the study participants, locations of the study, data collection and analysis processes, and ethical considerations for the study will be provided. My role as the researcher will also be provided.

Design

A phenomenological study was chosen as the best approach for this study. This research approach is rooted in the study of sociology (Creswell, 2007). Sonnemann (1954) expressed the description of obtaining a record of the experience of an individual as phenomenology. Exploring how one makes sense of their experiences and then bringing those experiences to life is how Patton (2002) described a phenomenological approach.

The history of phenomenology was said to begin in the early 20th century with Husserl (1913 as cited in Paley, 1997). However, according to Moustakas (1994), Kant used the term in his writings as early as 1765. Moustakas surmised that the experience of an individual could only be understood through sensory perceptions. According to Husserl, these perceptions then bring to life a conscious awareness. Phenomenology focuses on a phenomenon through the lived experience and how comprehending the phenomenon will provide a deeper meaning and
understanding of the phenomenon. This deeper meaning and understanding then allows for its interpretation (Creswell, 2012; Giorgi, 1985; Giorgi, Fischer, & Von Eckartsberg, 1971; Moustakas, 1994; Sartre, 1956).

Husserl (1913 as cited in Paley, 1997), through the field of psychology, introduced this method with the rationale that understanding the lived subjective experiences of individuals was vitally important (Hays & Singh, 2012). Having an understanding of the lived experiences of participants might provide insight to one’s intentionality. According to Hays and Singh (2012), by applying phenomenology to the field of education, it is possible to learning environments that can meet the needs of students. This then leads to making the education process more effective.

Conducting a phenomenological study will allow this researcher the opportunity to obtain from the participants “comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). In his 1932 book *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, Schutz described the researcher as one who is conducting a “reflective analysis of another person’s completed act” (p. 36).

More specifically, this study will be a transcendental phenomenological study. This type of phenomenological study according to Creswell (2013) is one in which the experiences of the participants is the focus versus the researcher’s interpretations of the experience. By conducting a transcendental phenomenological study, the analysis of the data will provide only the voice of the participants.

When compared to other qualitative research methods, conducting a phenomenological study proves to be the best approach to this study. This study will be conducted at a single community college. Narrative research simply focuses on the life of a single individual (Creswell, 2013). If the research goal were to study an event, activity or program, the case study
approach would be appropriate (Creswell, 2013). According to Hays and Singh (2012), an ethnographic study is one in which the researcher is seeking to describe and interpret a group sharing the same culture. Lastly, this study is not seeking to develop a theory from the collected data, which describes a grounded theory study (Creswell, 2013).

The focus of this study was the lived experiences of African-American males enrolled in post-secondary education at the community college level. This was the best approach to understand the thoughts and perspectives of African-American males as related to their success in graduating from a community college with a certificate or degree.

In conducting this study, the end goal is to gain an understanding of the phenomena of “continuing to graduation” for African-American males enrolled in community college. According to Hays and Singh (2012), this self-reflection will become the lens into the research process. The rationale in choosing the phenomenological approach to conducting this study is the ability to gather the perceptions of the participants through their lived experiences.

This is a purposive sample. African-American males are the only population who can provide an understanding of their lived experiences about their demographic and gender (Creswell, 2013).

**Research Questions**

There are three research questions that will guide this study:

RQ1: Why do some African-American males continue to graduation from a community college within three years while others do not?

RQ2: What do African-American males need outside the community college campus to continue to graduation?
RQ3: What do African-American males need on the community college campus to continue to graduation?

**Setting**

According to U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.), San Bernardino County had a population of 2,088,371 as of 2013. The city of this research study is located in San Bernardino County. In terms of size, but not population, San Bernardino County is the largest county in the United States. The post-secondary institution location for the study will be a community college located in San Bernardino County.

The community college has a success rate for African-American students of roughly 49% (CCCCO, 2016, page withheld for confidentiality). This community college is convenient to my geographic location. Additionally, I have worked 13 of my 18 years in the field of education serving high school and young adult students attending K-12 schools, adult education, and vocational training programs located in San Bernardino County and have served many African-American male students in my years in the education field. The community college was also a college I sent former students to in my role as a college preparatory counselor.

The current leadership team has expressed to me a sense of urgency to meet the needs of the school’s African-American student population. In those conversations, the need to increase the success rate for African-American males has been stressed as those in leadership feel at some level, this population is more challenging to reach as they are not as open to seeking assistance as their female counterparts.

**Participants**

The participants for this qualitative phenomenological study were African-American males currently enrolled in a community college. There were nine participants selected for this
study. For those participants enrolled in community college, they must have completed a minimum of 12 units of study. All study participants were at least 18 years of age. According to Patton (2002), by setting parameters that all participants in a study must meet, this is referred to as criterion sampling.

The participants enrolled in the community college were recruited through my attendance at the African-American student club meetings and approved fliers distributed around the campus. I also utilized the sampling procedure of snowballing. Creswell (2013) stated snowballing occurs when participants refer their peers to participate in a study they believe also meet the criteria for the study. The sample size was easily met, as maximum variation sampling was employed. This sampling approach ensured, as many participants as possible were able to volunteer for the study. Creswell (2013) referenced to this approach as popular in qualitative studies.

The only criteria set forth beyond participants identifying as African-American males at least 18 years of age, was the successful completion of 12 college units. African-American males were chosen as the sole demographic for this study based on statistical indicators that African-American students rank lowest in completing a certificate or degree from the chosen community college for this study (CCCCO, 2016).

Procedures

In order to conduct this qualitative phenomenological study, I first met with the Dean of Research at the community college. His assistant emailed me the requirements from the college for conducting research and obtaining conditional Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the institution. That conditional permission is included with my Liberty University IRB application.
Upon successful proposal defense to my dissertation committee, I submitted my application to the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once approval was received, I submitted my proposal to the community college for full IRB approval. After receiving final approval from the community college, I began the process of seeking participants for the study. The outreach coordinator, First Year Experience counselor, and Dean of Research are African-American males who work on the campus. They committed to assist in locating potential study participants. Also, my sister-in-law is the faculty advisor for the African-American student club. She introduced me to students participating in the campus club. This helped me to establish a positive rapport with the African-American male students on the campus.

Regarding locations to conduct my study, I first spoke to the outreach coordinator of the college. He, along with another faculty members, informed me they would assist me in securing a location on campus for conducting the data collection for the study. I requested a computer lab for the students to complete the web-based questionnaire and survey if there were students who did not own their own laptop or tablet. For those with devices, I asked them to complete the instruments during a two-week window. I also asked for a private conference room in order to conduct the interviews over the course of two-weeks. This allowed sufficient time for missed and rescheduled appointments. A $10.00 gift card was given to each of the community college participants upon their completion of all instruments.

All research study interviews were recorded using an audio/visual recording device or an audio software computer program as necessary. Interviews were conducted and the results were analyzed using the analysis software program Nvivo (Castleberry, 2014; Lewis, 2004). Data from those students who participated in the survey were analyzed along with the remaining
surveys and the results are provided in Chapter Four of this study. The surveys were administered not only to obtain demographic data, but also to obtain information from the participants about their experiences in high school and the community college campuses as appropriate for the participants.

**The Researcher's Role**

I did not become serious about completing my college education until almost 29 years of age. At that time, I quit a full-time job and entered a community college as a full-time student attending class during the day. In attending classes on campus in the morning and early afternoon, many of the students were several years my junior. In attending the community college, the researcher gravitated toward other African-American students on campus for conversation due to cultural familiarity. The campus where I attended had a Black Student Union campus club. I joined when asked in part to meet other students who were more familiar with teachers on campus and because African-American staff and faculty with whom I would hold conversations with, as they were closer to my age, and were encouraging me to not only graduate from community college, but to pursue all education endeavors I desired. At times in those meetings, I was vocal with opinions and as a result, when the President of the club resigned, the students nominated me as the next President.

During the next several months, I held many conversations with the faculty advisor of the club, who eventually became my personal mentor. Our conversations began to focus on what she called the community college Black hole. This Black hole was the term used to describe students who enrolled in community college, but never graduated or transferred to a four-year college or university. From that point, there has been a curiosity about this phenomenon.
When the need arose to change my dissertation topic, the researcher was shown data detailing the lack of success for African-American males enrolled in community college. This topic was just as important to me as my initial topic and was an easy shift in my thought process. As a relative, friend, and colleague to many at the County Community College, a graduate of a California community college, an educator, and African American, conducting this study is important in the worldview of the researcher. Gaining the voice through the lived experiences of African-American males is in my opinion a necessity, as I believe this group is labeled far too often solely in statistics and their voices unheard.

**Data Collection**

The data collection portion of this qualitative phenomenological study was anchored in rigor and varied data collection techniques. According to Hays and Singh (2012), illustrating themes from multiple data methods is known as triangulation. Those methods consist of a demographic and information gathering survey, a questionnaire, and individual interviews. I chose these three methods for data collection, as they provided the narratives of the participants. The lived experiences of the participants were obtained through the data in each of the data collection instruments based upon their personal experiences (Campbell, Ellis, & Olive, 2012).

All community college data collection took place on the campus of the county community college, as this was the most familiar and convenient location for the researcher and the participants to meet. These data collection procedures followed the recommendations of established qualitative researchers in the field (e.g., Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994).
Interviews

The principal method of data collection for a qualitative phenomenological study is interviews (Creswell, 2007; Englander, 2012; Hatch, 2002). As the purpose of phenomenological research is to examine the lived experiences of the participants, getting this experience through their sense of speaking would seem to serve as the best opportunity to remove any researcher perspective from the process. The interview takes away what Husserl (1954) stated as “any critical position-taking which is interested in their truth or falsity, even any position on their guiding idea of an objective knowledge of the world” (p. 135).

The interview protocol utilized for this qualitative phenomenological study was the semi-structured interview. According to Hays and Singh (2012), this type of interview protocol allows for flexibility with asking the pre-established questions, asking additional questions, leaving some questions out of the interview, or changing the questions as the interview progressed. They also stated this interview protocol is the most culturally appropriate across cultures. This instrument includes more of the participant’s voice, thus giving a better picture of the phenomenon being investigated. By utilizing a semi-structured interview process, the researcher was able to adjust the questions for the participants in the study. Questions asked in the interviews focused on how the participants lived experiences both in and outside of educational institutions are affected by both on-campus and off-campus life experiences. This method of data collection allowed for the most feedback in determining the factors causing or impeding graduation. It is my belief, that the semi-structured interview process allowed me to gather the most authentic responses from the study participants. There were 10-15 questions for the interview protocol.
Table 1

Interview Question Outline

RQ1: Why do some African-American males continue to graduation from a community college within three years while others do not?

1. Please give me a description of your feelings when you first began attending community college.

2. How supportive do you believe instructors are of African-American male students at this community college?

3. Who or what plays an important role in your life that contributes to your graduation while in college?

4. How supportive are family or other adults of you attending college? In what ways do they support you?

RQ2: What do African-American males need outside the community college campus to continue to graduation?

1. Are you comfortable asking questions in your classes? Why or why not?

2. How often do you go to your instructors during their office hours for assistance? Secondly, do you obtain the assistance you need?

3. How do you feel your gender affects your education experiences at this community college?

4. How do you feel being African American affects your education experiences at this community college?

5. How supportive do you believe employees who work on campus are of African-American males at this community college?
Table 1 (Cont’d.)

RQ3: What do African-American males need on the community college campus to continue to graduation?

1. How many hours per day do you spend completing class assignments and studying outside of class?

2. Do you feel this is enough time based on your other obligations outside of school?

3. Considering your responsibilities outside of school, do you find it challenging to continue your education? Why or why not?

4. How different are you treated by your peers who attend college than your peers who do not attend college?

5. Is there anything else you would like to add that I have not asked about during this interview?

All study participants were interviewed for this study. I asked the community college to provide a quiet room on campus in order to conduct the interviews with the college students.

The interview questions were piloted with two participants for face and content validity. The first was an African-American male colleague who holds a Ph.D. He is in his late-20s, and also a community college graduate. The second person to serve as a pilot interviewee was an African-American male in his late 40s, a community college graduate and also holds a Ph.D. Adjustments were made to the interview protocol after conducting the pilot study.

Questionnaire

According to Van Manen (1990), using a variety of data collection methods is a way to gain a fuller description of participant experience when conducting a phenomenological study. Interviews are what are commonly used, and multiple interviews of the same participants as
suggested by Creswell (2013). Conducting multiple interviews with the same participants does not provide me with a deeper understanding of the experience of the participants. However, a questionnaire served as an additional data collection method in an effort to complete the phenomenology. The questionnaire served as an additional method of inquiry with open-ended responses. According to Patton (2002), the purpose of the questionnaire was to gain an understanding of the world as seen by the participants. When seeking to obtain large amounts of data from participants, a questionnaire meets the requirement for a viable data collection instrument option according to Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh (2002). The questionnaire provided additional data for all research questions in this study. The instrument is located in Appendix A.

**Survey**

The survey in this study served as not only a tool for collecting demographic data, it also provided descriptive data which provided information regarding internal and external factors leading to or impeding success for African-American males in their quest to complete their education. The survey was completed via the Internet. According to Sánchez-Fernandez, Muñoz-Leiva, and Montoro-Ríos (2012), there has been significant growth in the use of web-based surveys. The survey instrument is normally a part of a quantitative study. However, the descriptive survey is appropriate to use in a qualitative study and has been utilized as a data collection tool in research studies (Gilk, Parker, Muligande, & Hategikamana; 2005; Harris & Wood, 2013). The questions in the survey were examined by two college professors and piloted with two African-American males who graduated from a community college to ensure face and content validity. It is located in Appendix B.

The survey was administered to the individuals identified as participants in this study. It took the participants no more than one hour to complete. The identified participants were asked
to choose a neutral location for the researcher and the mentor to meet. The data from the surveys addressed the research questions pertaining to African-American males achieving success while enrolled in community college. It also addressed the research question regarding factors that support or impede African-American male success in education institutions.

**Data Analysis**

The data analyzed for this phenomenological study was comprised of three instruments. The first instrument was the interview protocol (Appendix A). The interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews. This interview method allowed the researcher the ability to ask not only the pre-established questions, but also the flexibility to change and adjust the questions as the interview progressed (Hays and Singh, 2012). All participants were individually interviewed. The electronic survey consisted of 34 questions. All participants completed the survey. The entire survey instrument consisting of demographic questions can be found in Appendix B. The final data collection instrument was a questionnaire consisting of four questions. The questionnaire is Appendix C.

After the data collection process was completed, all interviews were transcribed verbatim before being analyzed. The data analysis method utilized for this phenomenological study was that of Moustakas (1994). The phenomenological reduction method of Moustakas (1994) was followed with the following steps: (a) Bracketing the Researcher’s Experience, (b) Bracketing the Topic, (c) Horizontalization, (d) Clustering into Themes, (e) Textural Description of the Experience, (f) Structural Descriptions of the Experience, and (g) Textural-Structural Experience. The clustering of the themes and horizontalization integration was accomplished by integrating the results from the interviews. While the number of participants interviewed for this research study was 10, saturation was reached after collecting and analyzing the data of nine
participants. According to Hays and Singh (2012), Creswell (2006) suggests that the sample size in a phenomenological study include as many as 10 people (p. 173). Hays and Singh (2012) cited Corbin and Strauss (2008) when discussing their definition of saturation as “the point in the data collection and analysis where the researcher does not identify any ideas, themes, or large constructs as new data are collected” (p. 173). Upon reviewing the data of the tenth participant, no new themes or ideas were revealed adding to the data already collected and analyzed.

**Bracketing the Researcher’s Experience**

In order to conduct this research from the perspective of a researcher and not with any biases, the researcher described her lived experiences as a college student. The researcher also described her career as an educator. Performing this task as Moustakas (1994) described, allowed her to view this phenomenon afresh. This allowed the researcher to collect the data with the sole purpose of exploring solely through the lived experiences of the participants and not dwell on her lived experiences to compare them with or diminish those of the participants (see Appendix D). As a result of the epoche process, the researcher was able to actively listen, observe, and interact with the data during the collection process Moustakas (1994). The epoche process prepared the way for new knowledge and information due to prior reflection (Husserl, 1954). After this process, the researcher was able to easily conduct the data analysis focusing on the research questions of this current study.

**Horizontalization**

All participant interviews were transcribed verbatim by a former colleague of the researcher who works with doctoral students in the areas of transcribing and editing dissertations. After receiving the transcripts, the researcher verified their accuracy and authenticity. Upon initial examination of the interviews, all statements were equally valued (Moustakas, 1994). As
the horizontalization process began with reading and re-reading the transcribed interviews, the researcher began to highlight and then code significant statements (Moustakas, 1994). The codes were then grouped and clusters formed. The most significant statements became themes. Some of the emerging statements included (a) sports, (b) systems of support, (c) anger, and (d) study. After eliminating overlapping statements such as funny and lazy, she combined the various significant statements and began the clustering process.

**Clustering into Themes**

Significant statements made by the participants during their interviews were identified and clustered into themes (Creswell, 2013). According to Van Manen (1990), a theme is an often-used phrase or word. The clustering process served to provide a full description of the phenomenon by discovering similar themes among the interviews of different participants. This also added to the rich description of the phenomenon. Codes were created using NVivo Software (Castleberry, 2014; Lewis, 2004). The same themes and similarities emerged across the participant interviews. This process began with the researcher reading each interview transcript. During the second reading, she began to highlight significant statements. After highlighting the statements from the first transcript, similar matching statements from subsequent transcripts were highlighted along with additional significant statements.

**Textural Descriptions of the Experience**

The focus of the textural descriptions of the data was on a vivid description of the individual experience of continuing in community college to reach graduation. The results from the brief interviews, which were transcribed verbatim, provided a rich description of the phenomenon. The description summarized the passionate feelings of the participants enrolled in a community college with the determination to continue to graduation and those of former high
school dropouts who not only desired to complete their high school diploma program but also enroll and graduate from community college. Reviewing the responses on all data collection instruments completed this process. The researcher noted similarities in the data from the group versus an individual participant. These similarities added to the clusters of emerging themes. The survey data responses revealed several similarities among the group. The individual examination of textural descriptions along with a composite description included a group description comprised of a collection of all individual descriptions Moustakas (1994).

**Structural Descriptions of the Experience**

The focus of the textural descriptions of the lived experiences of African-American males for this research study provided the what of the phenomenon of continuing to graduation from a community college as an African-American male. However, it is the underlying intricacies of the experience of the African-American male continuing to graduation from community college that is the focus of the structural description (Moustakas, 1994).

**Textural-Structural Description**

The textural-structural description was the final step in the data analysis process. This process offered a foundation for explaining the what and how of the experience (Hays and Singh, 2012). The textural-structural description consisted of utilizing the data from the interviews, questionnaires, and surveys. Also integrated into the process was the researcher’s reflection and intuition. Through this integration of all data instruments along with her reflection and intuition, the textural-structural description syntheses brought clarification to the experience and helped to show a fuller description of the essence of the continuing to graduation from a community college phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).
As the researcher began the data analysis process, the first step was to organize notes taken during the individual interviews. This information included some of the information shared by each participant during his interview. The information about the participants was written in narrative form resulting as a brief participant summary. This summary would provide additional information for the structural-textural experience of the data collection experience.

Next, the questionnaire responses were reviewed for similarities in statements from participant responses based upon each question. These similarities were then grouped. Additionally, the researcher noted responses that aligned with the theoretical frameworks grounding this study. The responses were highlighted by a separate color for each framework. The responses to the questionnaire were then analyzed according to the research questions guiding this study. Responses were labeled one, two, or three in accordance with the three research questions. The researcher then reviewed the survey for similar responses by the participants. The similarities were highlighted and percentages noted when a majority of responses were similar. The researcher then checked similarities in responses from the majority of participants in the survey with those matching the questionnaire.

The transcripts were read several times and significant statements were identified. Identifying the themes in the data then began by triangulating the significant statements from the surveys and questionnaires with those from the interview transcripts. This process of horizontalization is the first step in the Moustakas (1994) data analysis approach. As similar significant statements in all three data collection instruments were identified, elimination of overlapping, ambiguous, and repetitive statements were eliminated (Moustakas, 1994). Coding took place as common phrases were identified from re-reading responses, and patterns observed as essential were recoded in cluster (Moustakas, 1994). As revisions and additions of codes took
place during the analysis process where significant statements were read and re-read to understand their meaning. During the repeating this process several times, the smaller codes were combined eliminating smaller categories and clustering codes into the broader categories. These clusters were grouped based upon their meaning creating themes. The original codes and clusters can be found in Appendix E. The final codes along with the enumeration and themes are presented in Table 2.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in conducting, analyzing, and reporting the findings of this qualitative phenomenological study fell into the categories of transferability, confirmability, creditability, and dependability. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), having the creditability, dependability, transferability, and confirmability incorporated in the research establishes a strong study. Throughout the study, various strategies were implemented during the analysis to ensure trustworthiness was maintained.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to ensuring data as collected would be similar if collected in a different population (Hays & Singh, 2012). For this qualitative phenomenological study, the structure of thick descriptions was implemented to the data analysis process (Hays & Singh, 2012). According to Hays and Singh (2012), thick descriptions move beyond describing basic details and processes in analyzing data. It goes further to provide descriptions that include additional sensory observations of the participant during a face-to-face data collection method. An example of this might include the body movements of a participant when answering certain questions. The researcher was able to add thick descriptions to my data analysis through
### Table 2

*Enumeration of Open Codes for Emerging Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Codes</th>
<th>Enumeration of open-code across data</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic Life Experience</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death/Murder of Family Member</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Abuse-Witness or Victim</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension or Expulsion</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents divorcing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Care or Legal Guardianship</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarceration – Self, Family Member or Friend</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Relationship with father</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger about life experience</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not allowed to attend school due to school discipline</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropping out of community college</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with death of mother</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absentee parent</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability of home life – moving</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing schools</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (Cont’d.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attend Instructor’s Office Hours</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Tutoring</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Than Two Hours Per Class Study Time Daily</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needing Assistance With Transition From High School to Community College</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devoting More Time to Sports vs. Academics</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needing More Financial Assistance to Stay in School – Lack of Financial Aid due to age or parent income</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents Unable to Assist with Class Assignments</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Adult Mentor Supporting Education</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No African American Male Mentor</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed/Underemployed</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Understanding College Campus</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

providing details from notes taken as the researcher observed the participants during the data collection process. It is highly possible collecting data in the same manner from a different population would yield similar results.
Peer Reviewing

In order to provide confirmability for this study, I utilized a peer reviewer. The peer reviewer had no prior knowledge of the participants and no confidential information about the participants was shared with the peer reviewer. The sole job of the peer reviewer was to help with the use of the NVivo software (Castleberry, 2014; Lewis, 2004). The peer reviewer possessed more knowledge regarding the coding and clustering process through the use of the software than the researcher.

Member Checking

As the data from the interviews, questionnaires, and surveys were collected, all were presented to the participants for member checking. Meeting with participants to ensure their responses on the electronic instruments and the interviews ensured creditability throughout the data collection process. At the conclusion of each interview, I checked with the participant from the previous interview to ensure he was comfortable with his responses on the survey and questionnaire. Also, each participant was afforded the time to provide any feedback not only regarding the data collection process, but also to provide a second opportunity to add any additional information to their individual interview. With each participant verifying the information provided on all instruments was accurate, this met credibility and trustworthiness was established. Member checking, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) is a necessary step in the data collection process. By completing this step, creditability was established. Additionally, triangulation of the data was also established as the data was gathered from three different sources, which included an individual interview, questionnaire, and a survey. In order to establish a strong study, trustworthiness is an essential component. By establishing the credibility, dependability, and transferability of information collected during this data collection
through the participants’ verification that they gave accurate descriptions of their lived experiences in their responses, it allowed me to reach the conclusion the findings in the data are credible and trustworthy.

**Ethical Considerations**

The ethical considerations in this research study were implemented to ensure the rights of the participants were protected throughout the entire data collection process and across all data collection instruments. It was my desire to ensure all participants volunteering for this study understood their autonomy. Participants used pseudonyms for the study in order to protect their identity. The participants were given the autonomy to choose or be assigned a pseudonym in an effort to ease tensions and establish a rapport during the interview process. Prior to completing any of the data collection instruments, all participants were given a consent form to sign. The form clearly delineated their voluntary participation in the research study. The statement giving the participants the right to withdraw at anytime during the study along with the knowledge that none of the information provided by the participants during the data collection process would be shared with anyone from their respective education institution. All data that showed names and other personal information belonging to the participants was redacted with only the pseudonym visible. All physical data has been secured in a locked file cabinet in my home. The electronic survey and questionnaire data was extracted on an external hard drive along with audiovisual data and was also stored in the secured locked file cabinet. All data will be destroyed in three years. The integrity of all participants was respected during the data collection processes of this research study (Hays & Singh, 2012).
Compensation

The participants who volunteered for this study were greatly appreciated. Their transcribed interviews along with a thank you letter were mailed to participants. The data collection process of this research study took place approximately three weeks before Christmas. As part of the study, all participants were also given $10.00 as a thank you for participating in the study.

Confirmability

Providing genuine reflections of the participants in the findings of this study provided confirmability (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researcher utilized peer reviewing as the method to provide an additional set of eyes in the examination of research methods, data collection and analysis, along with meanings (Creswell, 2013). The peer was a tenured professor who completed both qualitative and quantitative published studies and is trusted. The peer has also served as an editor and dissertation chair and committee member.

Enumeration was performed during the coding process (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). This showed the frequency of the same responses by the participants along with the number of participants responding to a particular question. By using select quotes from the participants, this helped ensure confirmability should another researcher choose to conduct this study (Creswell, 2013).

Dependability

According to Hays and Singh (2012), utilizing strategies in order to ensure that findings in a research study will be similar if utilized in similar studies conducted with similar strategies is known as dependability. Should future qualitative phenomenological studies be conducted
with similar data collection instruments, those researcher’s findings should agree with the findings of this researcher.

**Credibility**

Patton (2002), Creswell (2013), and Hays and Singh (2012) discussed the process of using multiple methods of collecting data, also known as triangulation. For this study, formal responses, surveys, and semi-structured interviews were the three data collection methods used to ensure triangulation of data took place. According to Creswell (2013), using triangulation provides validity to the findings in the study.

**Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore strategies and resources leading to graduation for African-American males in community college. The phenomenological approach was considered the most appropriate research method for this study. Semi-structured interviews were the primary instrument utilized in this study to collect data. Additional data collection instruments included an electronic survey and an electronic questionnaire. All interviews were transcribed. Moustakas (1994) seven-step model was the process for analyzing the data.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings and data analysis of the interviews, questionnaires, and surveys that align with the research questions and theoretical frameworks guiding this phenomenological study. Also included in this chapter is the process for collecting and analyzing the data for this research study. These findings and results explored the lived experiences of nine African-American males who volunteered for this research study. Provided in this chapter is a summary about each participant. Additionally, this chapter includes a synthesis of their experience as it pertains to the phenomenon of graduating from a community college.

Data for this phenomenological study was collected from participants via individual interviews, surveys, and questionnaires. The goal of this study was to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of continuing to graduation for African-American males from a community college. The main focus of this study was the lived experiences of African-American males enrolled in a community college. According to Hays and Singh (2012), this self-reflection becomes the lens into the research process. The phenomenological approach was utilized to conduct this research study as it provided the researcher the ability to gather the perceptions of the participants through their lived experiences. The participants in this research study were a purposive sample. African-American males are the only population able to provide an understanding of their lived experiences about their gender and demographic (Creswell, 2013).

The participants for this research study were nine African-American male community college students. All participants were at least 18 years old. In order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were chosen by or assigned to all participants.
The participants were given the option of choosing their pseudonym as a means to establish a rapport. According to Kawulich (2005), one of the purposes of establishing a rapport is to create an environment where the participants feel at ease in providing personal information to the researcher. Therefore, during the initial conversation before beginning the interviews the researcher extended to the participants the opportunity to choose a pseudonym as a means making the participants feel more comfortable. The following section provides a brief description of each participant. The summary includes information each participant shared about himself before the interview. This information also adds to the descriptions of this experience for the purposes of transferability.

**Participants**

This qualitative research study sought to understand how nine African-American males experienced the phenomenon of graduating from community college. The participants for this qualitative research study were selected utilizing the sampling procedures of snowballing, and maximum variation sampling was employed to ensure a significant number of volunteers for this study (Creswell, 2013). There were three sources of data analyzed for this study. By utilizing multiple methods of collecting data, triangulation was achieved, thus providing validity to the findings in this study (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2002). The results of this study were first presented by themes. Finally, the data from this study was presented in narrative text answering the research questions that guided this study.

The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: Why do some African-American males continue to graduation from a community college within three years while others do not?
RQ2: What do African-American males need outside the community college campus to continue to graduation?

RQ3: What do African-American males need on the community college campus to continue to graduation?

Below is a brief summary about each of the participants in this research study.

Andre – Andre spoke in a quiet tone throughout the interview. He was constantly swinging in his chair during the interview. Andre talked about being an exceptional track athlete in high school. He said he is on the community college track team.

Barry – Barry was enthusiastic about school and emphasized many of his responses. He works more than 40 hours per week. He moved back home with his mother in order to balance work and college; but finds himself having to work harder as his mother demands a large amount of financial support. Barry shared that he has no issue contributing to the household, but could not understand why his mother would not support him more as she earned her college degree as a working adult and is employed.

Hakeem – Hakeem loves playing football in college and does not work. He has high hopes of transferring to his dream four-year University upon graduating from community college. He wants to continue playing football at the NCAA Division I level. He did not attend a four-year university upon graduating from high school due to having all Advance Placement courses in 11th grade and not achieving high grades in all of the courses.

Lyle – Lyle chose the name Lyle Gibson as he said it was the name he gave his peers in middle and high school when he did not want them to know his real name. He is an energetic young man. Lyle gave short answers during the beginning of the interview; but opened up and dialoged more in his responses as the interview progressed.
Malik – Malik chose his pseudonym as he said it was the name he gave in school to those who did not know him when he found himself in trouble and the school was going to call his mother. Malik attempted community college after high school, but dropped out to join the military. He discussed struggling to return to college due to not knowing how to navigate through the system to obtain classes, and utilize his military benefits. He found out about the campus veteran resource center and goes there often for help. He spoke of the student worker in the center as his mentor.

Michael – Michael attended grade school before and during segregation. He is retired from the military and a civilian job. He discussed attending college after graduating high school before choosing to enter the military. He decided to return to college to enrich his learning and works as a student worker in the veteran resource center as a way to “help the younger generation.” Michael was open and eager to discuss his life experiences.

Perseus – Perseus stated he chose the name as he enjoys studying Greek mythology and Perseus was a Greek demigod. During the interview, Perseus was talkative and easily shared his lived experiences. He is a student-athlete who is also working while attending college full-time.

Roy – Roy remained soft-spoken throughout the interview. He was the only participant who answered his phone during the interview process. He discussed being in special education courses in high school. He is taking advantage of the special education services offered at the community college. Roy also discussed being bullied in middle and high school.

Samuel – Samuel said he chose his pseudonym because it is a character in the Bible. He also stated his plans on naming his first son Samuel. He juggles a full college course load of 12 units, work, football, and is active in activities in his church. He plans on attending a four-year university by earning a scholarship based on academics or football. He discussed not looking for
support from family or friends as he felt the responsibility of completing his education falls solely on him.

Results

Procedures for Data Collection

After obtaining IRB approval from Liberty University, the researcher hand-carried a copy of the Liberty IRB approval to the dean of research at the community college. This allowed the researcher to obtain permission from the community college to begin the data collection. The researcher then spoke to staff on the community college campus that had previous knowledge about the research study. She was introduced to an administrator at the college. He had student workers pass out her IRB approved flyers in order to obtain potential participants. Additionally, she canvassed the campus and spoke to African-American males about the study in order to meet potential research study participants. Potential research participants had their age verified by the researcher by viewing their state identification cards. The researcher, through reviewing their unofficial transcripts also verified number of credits. On days the researcher was on campus to meet participants and collect data, a staff member at the college gave the researcher use of a private conference room with adjoining space to conduct the interviews. There was additional space outside the conference room for the participants to complete the electronic survey and questionnaire.

Upon arrival to their appointments, the researcher conducted the one-on-one recorded interview in the designated conference room. These interviews allowed the participants to elaborate on their individual perceptions and experiences regarding graduating from community college. Upon completion of the interview, the researcher obtained the email address of the participant and emailed the survey and questionnaire. The participants either accessed the
instruments via their cellular phone or with one of the laptop computers provided by the
researcher. Participants completed the survey and questionnaire immediately after the interview
that took place in the designated conference room on the community college campus. Interview
times varied by participant, and ranged between 40 minutes to one hour. The participants left the
conference room and sat at a table outside the room to immediately complete the survey and
questionnaire. The survey and questionnaire completion time was approximately 40 minutes.
When the participant stated they completed the survey and questionnaire, the researcher,
reviewed the participant responses on each instrument to ensure that each question and survey
response was completed. Following this verification, the participant received their $10.00
compensation as stated in the flyer and on the consent form.

Results from Pilot Study

The data collection instruments and procedures were refined through pilot testing
(Creswell, 2013). The main purpose for piloting the study was to increase credibility of this
research study. The secondary purpose was to further determine clarity, appropriateness, and
feasibility of the data collection instruments. The interview, questionnaire, and survey were
administered to two African-American males. The researcher chose these two participants
because they are the only two African-American males known by the researcher who graduated
from community college. During the piloting process, the pilot participants contacted the
researcher via a scheduled conference call after the interviews. They both asked questions about
the interview protocol. During the phone conversation, the researcher re-phrased questions on
the instrument and asked the pilot participants if the adjusted questions were relevant to
ascertaining information about graduation from community college. Upon both participants
agreeing the adjusted questions would be relevant to the research study, the interview protocol
was complete. The questionnaire and survey were emailed to the participants after the telephone call. The questionnaire and survey were not completed after several weeks and after the researcher contacted each participant two times via phone. This delay resulted in the researcher developing the process of having each research study participant complete the electronic survey and questionnaire immediately after being interviewed. This refined process enabled the researcher to have all instruments completed by each participant on the same day. The approximate time to complete the research study instruments was listed on the flyer along with being stated on the consent form. This process was then explained verbally to each potential participant when the consent form was administered.

**Themes**

There were three themes that emerged from the data. These three essential themes emerging from the data were based upon the lived experiences and perceptions of nine community college students. All of the participants were African-American males, and at least 18 years of age. The three themes were (a) Trauma (b) Anger and (c) Systems of Support. Within the themes, the participants also discussed parental relationships, study habits, and navigating through college. The emerging themes were based upon the participant responses during the individual interview, questionnaire, and survey instruments utilized by the researcher for the data collection portion of this research study.

**Trauma**

During the individual interviews for this research study, each of the participants spoke openly about their worst and traumatic life experiences. Their stories ranged from death of a loved one to being bullied. Porche, Fortuna, Lin, and Alegria (2011) conducted a national study, which included African-American young adults ages 21-29. According to the results of the
study, those exposed to trauma had a higher rate of dropout and African-American youth in the study was increased for African Americans over Caucasians. Barry is one of the participants who are attempting to graduate community college after dropping out.

Barry is 23 years old. As he discussed his life growing up, he said, “Growing up was pretty fun until about 11 years old.” He went on to state that this was the same time his parents split up. He also discussed having two older brothers, one that is deceased and one in jail for 16 years. He elaborated on his worst experience saying, “Some of my worst was when my brother got killed. That was real tough and then my other brother; incarcerated at a young age. That was kind of rough for me too and my father being incarcerated too.” When discussing school, Barry discussed the “various tragedies” in his life and that his academics were affected. Michael also endured family separation. At 61, he also experienced a crisis many young African Americans dealt with, segregation. His current enrollment in community college is also a result of dropout.

Michael attended Fordham Memorial University upon graduating high school, but left after one semester. He then transitioned into the Army. During Michel’s interview, he discussed being a veteran and a retiree from the U.S. Postal Service. Michael was a tank and two-ton truck mechanic in the military and then worked for the postal service for 26 years. Michael works on the college campus as a student worker in the veteran resource office. He discussed working not for the money, but “due to the extensive amount of pressure under the military in Iraq and Afghanistan. You know that it’s just to help these kids, because some of them got it real bad.” He talked about returning to community college after being classified as a disabled veteran. His classification allowed him to “choose a sedentary major.”

When discussing his schooling, Michael stated he “was a victim of forced desegregation.” Michael discussed the desegregation occurring when he was 15. At this same
point in his school life, Michael discussed his parents separating and then divorcing. He said, “that’s why I say that’s probably the lowest point in my life when I was 15 and we had forced desegregation and my parents were separated and divorced and all this stuff.” Additionally, he stated, “It was really tough for me because I was accustomed to both of them.” Michael also discussed being the only one of four children in his family to graduate high school and he stated, “I was the only one to graduate high school. I was more involved because I was in the band. All of them decided to give up. So it was you know, I guess it was kind of disappointing.” As a current student at the community college, Michael referred to himself as “a victim of the age barrier.” While Barry and Michael experienced family trauma due to separation, trauma at the hands of a parent is Perseus’s experience.

Perseus is 20 years old. He chose his pseudonym because he is “way into” Greek mythology. He discussed Perseus as being a Greek demi-god. He also mentioned being an intellectual. However, he said at times he feels being an intellectual is not accepted. He talked about knowing this from doing his own research. He also referred to himself as a “cool nerd.” This is the second community college Perseus has attended.

When Perseus talked about his childhood, he mentioned a traumatic experience between he and his dad that happened when he was eight or nine years old. “Me and my dad got into it. Long story short, he basically picked me up and slammed me on the ground and it kind of messed up all my teeth. There was blood everywhere.” Perseus went on to describe his feelings about his dad. “I’m kind of resenting him, even to this day for that. So it was a really big thing, my mom was really mad at him. It was just a lot going on.” All of these participants dropped out from community college and have now returned. While Michael will not continue his education after graduating, Barry and Perseus desire to transfer to a four-year university. All
three stated on their survey responses they intend to persist to graduation from community college.

Boyraz, Horne, Owens, and Armstrong (2013) conducted a study on persistence in college. The study examined the relationships of academic achievement and college persistence of African-American students with trauma exposure. The researchers discussed the difficulties of students transitioning from high school to college as more stressful for those exposed to potentially traumatic events (PTEs). For three of the participants, they are currently continuing to move through their community college experience in light of their experiences during their K-12 school years. Roy wants to become a writer or an English teacher. When asked about his school experiences, Roy said he was physically bullied in school. He also said his worst experiences were “fighting with my friend and not really getting along with my father.” He talked about his academic struggles while in school even though diagnosed with a learning disability. Roy discussed not feeling as if he learned anything in school and he is just catching up in math and English in college. During the interview and on his survey, he stated he is utilizing the student disability resources at the community college. Bullying in school can stem from being different. For Andre, it was his home life that made him different.

Andre began the interview discussing sports. He talked about being a high school athlete playing football, basketball, and running track. He smiled when discussing an award he received from the mayor for being student of the month and breaking records while running track. He discussed playing football and running track at the community college. When discussing his worst life experience, Andre discussed his living situation.
I would say my worst experience is I never really had a mom in my life. So I lived with a guardian. For about 10 years, my mom was never really there, but before the guardian I would live with my grandmother. (Andre, 2015)

Andre discussed having to care for his brother and both of them being in foster care. After providing this story, Andre never discussed his mother, or guardian in the interview. Andre had a mom, but was unable to live with her. His peers bullied Roy. However, when, trauma happens to an African-American male at home and in school, persisting could prove difficult.

Hakeem is a student athlete. When discussing his worst life experiences, Hakeem first talked about his junior year in high school when he failed all of his classes due to being lazy. He said, “I got so tied up with I don’t want to do this anymore because it was too hard because my whole schedule was AP (Advance Placement) and honors classes. It piled on too much for me.” He went on to talk about making it through that year and the next, but said his junior year “was one of my worst experiences.”

Hakeem continued to talk about another experience he considered one of his worst experiences; when his mother died. He described the experience saying, “It made me hard. She was always there for me. My dad is now. He has always been there, but it’s always good to have a motherly love.” He continued, “I mean her dying is like that big void.” Hakeem, then smiled as he went on to talk about his dad finding someone and that he was about to re-marry. He said, “she really replaces what my mom had, you know; I can really sense her motherly love when I talk to her or when she talks to me about anything.” Hakeem ended the experience about his mom by saying,

You know, when she passed away, it made me kind of sad, but at the same time I rejoiced. I was not happy, because you know anybody is going to be sad about their
parents’ passing, but I looked at it, as when she died, she doesn’t struggle anymore.

(Hakeem, 2015)

He went on to say, “She doesn’t have to go through pains anymore, you know? She had cancer. That cancer is now gone. She is worry free. She is set free, she is in a peaceful, better place now.” These participants are choosing to continue to graduate from community college as reflected in their survey and interview responses in spite of their experiences with trauma.

Trauma can be experienced in many ways according to researchers. Boyraz et al. (2013) discussed in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 4th edition (DSM-IV-TR) were various criterion for trauma. The DSM-IV-TR summarizes Criterion “A” trauma as “experiencing or witnessing an event that involves actual or perceived threat of death or serious injury or a threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others as well as a response of fear, helplessness, or horror” (p. 1). Also, according to the article, most students begin their college career having had a history of no less than one PTE. Additionally, from those that report their exposure, several have multiple exposures to PTEs and this can increase the potential for the development of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This exposure, according to the article may play a roll in dropout. Although Samuel did not drop out, in his lived experience, he related his trauma to helplessness.

When initially asked about his worst life experience, Samuel stated, “I feel like I’m one of those people who when something bad happens, I just like block it.” However, when discussing his elementary school experience, Samuel mentioned, “well I always moved a lot unfortunately. I was going from school to school and it was hard to retain any information. Every teacher holds their class differently in elementary.” Samuel continued to discuss his
behavior in school and another experience surfaced about his mother being abused along with his response to witnessing the abuse:

There was a point in my life where my mom was with her boyfriend at the time and he was abusive to her. And being 11 years old, 10, you don’t know how to deal with that. So I’d go to school and I’d project that or I now know that it’s projecting. There was a lot of negativity, a lot of anger. I’d project that to everyone. (Samuel, 2015)

Samuel went on to discuss feeling “useless” during that time in his life and living with stress and disappointment. Lyle experienced not only having to deal with someone outside the family, but also the death of his father.

Lyle opened the interview by discussing living with his mother and siblings. He next provided a short narrative about his father’s death and its impact. “And so my dad passed away back in middle school in seventh grade. I was 13 I think. It was pretty hard at the time with family and everything they kind of made it better.” However, when discussing his worst life experience, Lyle said it was the fact his mom was now reunited with her current boyfriend because nobody in the family “really cares for him. We just see it as he is in the way.” He later elaborated about the boyfriend when discussing his high school experience. Lyle talked about how in his sophomore high school his mom moved the family in with the boyfriend. He discussed how he coped with frequent moves. “They started moving around from house to house so often that it came between me living with my friend, my grandmother, my other friend, or living with my sister.” Dealing with the death of a parent is traumatic. However, there is a student demographic in community college that deals with death because they choose to fight for our nation’s freedom.
Malik was a participant who was enrolled in community college after initially dropping out, experienced the death of a parent, and is a Post 9-11 war veteran. Malik is 32 years old. Malik’s first statement during his interview in response to the researcher asking him to talk about himself was “I lost my mother at 14.” He continued to discuss being raised by his father and stepmother and entering a community college after graduating high school. He then discussed what he labeled his worst experience as he discussed his experience in the military, which he joined after dropping out of community college. “There’s basic training; the worst experience I had . . . well basically being in the military, like being in Iraq war and stuff like that. Stuff that I’ve seen.”

Instructors or counselors in the high school or at the community college may not know the trauma experienced by the African-American male participants in this research study. Additionally, in dealing with the traumatic experiences, counselors and other personnel must learn from the participants the effects the experiences have had on the participants in order to assist them in successfully graduating from college. This assistance needs to extend beyond the campus to help these commuter students with their lives off campus as well. However, even if known, personnel may not have the resources to assist them to obtain the necessary resources in order to remain in school and graduate from community college.

Porche et al. (2011) related the traumatic experiences of African-American males with dropout. When discussing persistence, Boyraz et al. (2013) also examined the relationship between academic persistence and college achievement for African-American males. Bush and Bush (2005) discussed community college as the sole post secondary opportunity for many African-American males. Community college also served as a gateway to employment. ESMI (2014) stated “the results of this study show that America’s community colleges have a
significant positive impact on the national economy and generate a return on investment for their main stakeholder groups: students, society, and taxpayers” (p. 7). If African-American males are not continuing to graduation from community college due not only to low academic achievement, but also from their own traumatic experiences, they miss out on possibly their only opportunity to attend college. Furthermore, our national economy is negatively impacted as a result.

**Anger**

As participants discussed their traumatic experiences, anger also emerged as a theme. The data showed areas that stem from or lead to anger including parental relationships, and poor behavior in school. According to Thomas and Stevenson (2009), anger for African-American males can show in a variety of covert and overt manners. They discuss humor as being a strategy for African-American youth in an effort to adapt and cope with daily stress. This humor can reveal itself in playing or clowning in class.

During his interview, Andre disclosed that he had been in foster care because his mom was unable to care for him. In his interview, Andre stated he had been living with a guardian for the last 10 years. He said prior to moving in with the guardian, he lived with his grandmother. Andre talked about his school years when he lived with his mother. “When I was living with my birth mother stuff was kind of shaky with my attendance and everything.” As the interview continued and the subject of behavior in school was discussed, Andre said, “in school I was always goofy, a class clown. I have always been known for being goofy.” Andre may have handled his anger through comedy; however, more overt and destructive methods for some African-American males serve as the strategy for coping with their anger.
However, unlike Andre, being funny was not the behavior exhibited by Hakeem when dealing with the death of his mother. In addition to being sad at age 14 when his mother died, Hakeem also said “it made me hard.” Thomas and Stevenson (2009) also discussed hyper masculinity resulting in overt behaviors stemming from anger. These behaviors might include insubordination, physical aggression, and non-compliance. For Andre and Hakeem, their anger resulted from dealing with experiences due to losing relationships with their mothers. However, anger also presented in the data when participants discussed their relationships with their fathers.

When Perseus discussed his experience of being slammed to the ground by his father that resulted in Perseus losing his teeth, he said, “I’m kind of resenting him, even to this day, I kind of resent him for that.” Barry discussed his feelings toward his father in a different manner. While discussing his experience with enrolling at the community college, Barry talked about how helpful the program coordinator, an African-American male, was in assisting him with returning to school. Toward the end of that discussion, Barry talked about his difficulty asking a male for help. Barry then continued to discuss his feelings toward his dad by saying,

Even with my dad now, I give him respect, but if he tells me something, it doesn’t register because he wasn’t around. When he tells me something, it’s in one ear and out the other. Not taking an order from him. (Barry, 2015)

During his interview, Samuel talked about being destructive at one point in his life. This destructive point in his life was occurring when he was 10 or 11. He discussed how he handled witnessing his mother being abused by her boyfriend during that time. Although the man in the home was not his biological father, this anger stemmed from the domestic abuse Samuel witnessed by a man toward his mother. He said, “I wanted to be destructive. There were a lot of fights. There was a lot of anger and negativity.” He went on to state, “And being 11 years old or
10 you don’t know how to deal with that. So I’d go to school and I’d project that, or now I know, that that is projecting. I would project that to everyone.” Samuel said this behavior continued and even became worse until he entered high school.

**Systems of Support**

Systems of support for African-American males while in community college can stem from various sources. Those sources can include family members, friends, a significant person on or off the community college campus, or a campus program. The data from this phenomenological study revealed that of the nine participants, six of their mothers do not have any education beyond a high school diploma. Furthermore, only one of the nine participants in this study reported their dad having any postsecondary education. While the parents can offer moral support, not having a college education means the parents may not have the capacity to understand the various systems and programs within a community college.

During his interview, Andre never mentioned a dad or another male being in his life growing up. He talked about his desire for being a “solid” role model for his younger brother, niece, and nephew. He also reported on his survey response that he does not have an African-American male on campus that supports him and is helping him to graduate. Andre’s sole response on the questionnaire regarding most important needs for African-American males enrolled in community college was “an adequate support system.” He listed one of his own personal needs on the questionnaire as a support system. Malik also discussed his lack of support regarding his first community college enrollment experience. In his interview, he said “Back then I really didn’t have anyone to guide me on what I should do.”

Samuel made a similar statement during his interview. He talked about supporting himself in college both financially and through self-motivation. He discussed having instructors
being supportive in his classes, but on the survey stated he had no African-American male supporting him in his education. On the questionnaire, Samuel stated the two resources he needed to be successful in community college were money and positive support. When he discussed getting support from family, Samuel said, “I never really understood the support factor from families because whether you support me or like what I am doing or not, it’s my success. She can’t support me; I’d help her financially. My mom. But it’s fine.” Samuel also talked about not seeking emotional support but “setting up a life for people coming behind me.” Barry talked about specifically having male support growing up. During his interview, Barry talked about being at home alone quite often due to his mother working and attending the same community college he now attends. He described his behavior during that time as “curious” and discussed support. “Where I grew up, seeing things at an early age it made me curious. Not having a role model; there was no man coming through where I lived.” He went on to discuss meeting a 25-year-old man when he was 15 who knew how to cut hair and taught Barry that skill. Barry continues putting that skill to work to get through school. Michael also discussed his issues with not having support.

During his interview, Michael discussed not currently having any support from his children, or other friends and family while enrolled in community college. He also discussed not being supported by a particular African-American male on the community college campus. When talking about his instructors, Michael said he gets along with all of them and does not feel as if he is not receiving the assistance he needs to succeed in class. However, he also discussed his main reason for working in the veteran resource center on the community college campus was to support the younger students. He said, “The gratification associated with it is enormous. This is something I had already planned to volunteer to do.” He continued saying, “that’s my
reward as a result of starting school here. It’s paying for itself, I get the joy of helping other people.” Michael has chosen to serve as a mentor while continuing his education.

Malik talked about returning to college after speaking with a male co-worker who explained getting college degrees. He then said he made a “conscious decision” to return to college. Malik discussed meeting an African-American male worker in the veteran resource center at the community college and that man being his main support on campus.

He is in his 60s and he makes sure I stay on top of my stuff and even if I do kind of fall off; he’d be the one to sit there in a minute and say something like ‘hey you’re messing up.’ (Malik, 2015)

Malik also said his veteran friends on campus support him. When asked about what he would want to put in place for African-American males if he were President of a community college, Malik’s first response was “I would establish a mentor type of program.” He then talked about stressing the importance of education by “having those who had a degree already such as doctors, lawyers, and accountants come and speak.” He discussed those speakers talking about their educational and personal life experiences and telling students, “If I can do it, believe me you can do it too.” Malik’s questionnaire response regarding what affects the success of African-American males enrolled in community college was “people saying that they cannot do it and it’s just a bad influence on them so they believe them and they actually drop out.”

Barry discussed the support he received from an African-American male on the community college campus along with one of the outcomes from that relationship. When discussing support from instructors at the community college, he discussed how he came to enroll in the college due to the support he received. “I came to the college because Mr. Jones (not his real name) called me because I had gone to a meeting a few months back. He said to
come to an orientation.” Barry discussed having a slow day at the barbershop the day of the orientation. “I came down and I saw an African American man that had a position and that right there kind of, you know, I wondered how did you get there, because there is nobody around me like this.” Barry talked about Mr. Jones complimenting him on his dress and the way he carried himself. Barry discussed asking Mr. Jones several questions about the challenges he would face if he decided to enroll in school such as cutting his hours at the barbershop and having his classes conflict with his work schedule. Barry stated,

He (Mr. Jones) said, ‘don’t worry about it.’ Anything I threw at him, he had an answer.

So I feel I’ve got to live up to that expectation because he went out of his way to help me get here. (Barry, 2015)

Barry continued, “So me not having that, that male companionship. It is kind of hard for me to ask another male for something.”

Barry continued through the interview discussing how while respecting his father, he really does not listen to him due to his being in and out of jail. He does discuss his family encouraging him to continue through college to graduation and that his mother did graduate from the community college. Barry also discussed how Mr. Jones allowed him to develop the name for a program at the college where first-year males are attending classes as a cohort. “Well the program that I came up with Mr. Jones’ approval. So I came up with the acronym BROTHERS: Brothers Reaching Out To Help Everyone Reach Success. I utilized my classmates for study groups and sessions. We hold each other accountable. On the survey instrument, Barry reported having an African-American male supporting him in his education and that the male was not a family member.
Lyle talked about his support coming from his instructors and an African-American male counselor. When discussing the support given by instructors at the community college, Lyle stated they are “extremely supportive.” He mentioned Dr. Smith (not his real name) as an African-American male instructor supporting him in college. Lyle also discussed receiving support in the form of rides to school or help with homework from his older sister who is also enrolled in college. Perseus provided a view of support from a student who dropped out and has now returned to community college. Perseus mentioned a strong support system at the community college even though it was not his first choice of colleges. He said he wanted to attend USC, “. . . but I mean things happen and I’m here.” He went on to say, “this is not my first choice of college but my support system at this college is very deep and I know that I have a lot of people, professors, mentors, counselors.” He also discussed his perception about the environment on the campus.

I feel like. . . is more a close knit family, so it let’s me know a lot of faculty and personnel and plus me being plugged in with the football team, it’s just some support system is always there. (Perseus, 2015)

Perseus also compared his current community college experience with the previous college he attended when discussing support.

I feel very taken care of. I mean, I wish it was a little bit faster for financial aid and what not, but other than that, they really do sit down and talk to you making sure they get the problem solved, you know. And, that’s what makes this college different than . . . because. . ., I only knew one counselor there and I don’t know anybody else there. So it was kind of like, even when I completed the whole semester, I just stopped going because
I just didn’t like it, you. Then coming here, it was like the support system was real.

(Perseus, 2015)

Having a genuine support system on campus from instructors is important for the African-American male. For the student-athlete, the support might come through playing a sport in college. Hakeem brought together his family, classroom, and athletic support during his interview. He spoke very highly about the support he receives from his instructors. He mentioned how they allow him to get work if he misses a class. He also talked about his instructors keeping him “on track about what needs to be done and how it should be done.”

Hakeem also discussed his desire to transfer to Oregon University and play football. He mentioned the only reason he did not attend directly from high school was due to his poor junior year, bringing down his GPA. However, when talking about receiving support from his family and friends to help him continue to graduation from community college, Hakeem said, “They always tell me to remember what I want to aim for and that’s to go to Oregon to play football. So they tell me if that’s where you want to go, push yourself.” He went on to say, “Get the coaches to notice you and the school academically to look at you as well.” Hakeem talked about his dad being a great supporter in his goals of graduating college and playing football. “My dad tells me ‘what else is there to do in life but to achieve your goals. If you don’t do that, then you’re missing out. You might be getting into trouble and I don’t like that.’” Hakeem said he has no other choice “but to push for it and achieve my goals.” Mentoring and support can come from instructors, counselors, other staff, and through athletic personnel. Mentoring can serve as a deciding factor for the African-American male crossing the bridge that extends from enrolling to graduation from community college. According to the various studies of Gardenhire-Crooks,
Collado, Martin, and Castro (2010) when discussing institutions of higher learning, mentoring is a primary strategy for helping African-American males achieve graduation.

The themes presented in this qualitative research study emerged from the lived experiences of the nine African males who volunteered for this study. The goal of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African-American males to understand the phenomenon of continuing to graduation from a community college.

**Research Question Findings**

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore strategies and resources leading to the continuance to graduation from community college for African-American males. For this research study, nine African-American males at least 18 years old who have completed at least 12 units at a community college participated in this research study. The data collected in this study from individual interviews, questionnaires, and surveys completed by the participants expressed their lived experiences. There were theoretical frameworks guiding this study. The first was Tinto’s (1975) theory of departure. He theorized that a student not integrated into the society of the community college would result in dropout. The second theory was Bean’s (1980) theory of attrition. Bean (1980) discussed the external challenges facing the commuter student due to not residing on campus. He theorized the reward of grades might not prove strong enough for a commuter student to persist to graduation due to challenges outside of the community college campus. Lastly was Bell’s (1977) Critical Race Theory. Bell’s theory was based upon discriminatory practices within education institutions. The following discussion delivers an understanding of the phenomenon explored in this study through descriptive summaries of the participants’ lived experiences based upon the research questions.
RQ1: Why do some African-American males continue to graduation from a community college within three years while others do not?

For this research study, the lived experiences of the participants provided information pertaining to the needs of African-American males. The participants were not asked this research question, as they have not had this lived experience. However, three participants have attended a community college prior to enrolling in the community college being studied. They shared their experiences during their interviews. Perseus discussed how he did not feel supported at the first community college campus he attended. He said during his interview that he only knew one counselor on his former college campus. When discussing his current community college environment, Perseus stated,

I feel like . . . is more a close knit family, so it let’s me know a lot of faculty and personnel and plus me being plugged in with the football team, it’s just some support system is always there. (Perseus, 2015)

About his second community college support system, Perseus said, “Then coming here, it was like the support system was real.” Barry also compared his first and second community college experiences. However, for Barry, it was the visibility and access to African-American males working at the college along with offering support that is helping Barry continue his enrollment. When discussing how being an African-American male has affected his educational experience at this current community college, Barry said,

Well, at this college African American, and seeing African-American staff on this campus is a good thing for me because when I went to the other college, there was absolutely . . . I saw about two African-American professors there. (Barry, 2015)

Barry went on to discuss that experience,
Never did I see any man, African-American man in high positions. So being here and seeing it’s the reality you can do this thing. You know, they have the solution to your problem and you just have to ask questions. You could probably get there. You’ve also got to also apply yourself and you’ve got to want it too, but it feels good to see, you know I can go to Dr. Smith, I can go to Mr. Jones you know, I can go to James and ask them how did you do this, or that? At this age, I look at my skin, and theirs and it is just the same thing. So, it’s a good feeling to see that. (Barry, 2015)

Malik also discussed why he was not successful in community college when he entered after graduation. He said, “Back then, I didn’t really have anyone to guide me on what I should do.” Malik then spoke about someone who now assists him. “He is in his 60s, and he definitely helps me out. He says I really need to stay on top of this.” Barry and Malik had the experience of attending another community college without graduating. Additionally, there was also data from participant questionnaire responses that asked what affects the success of African-American males in community college?

The responses from the questionnaire when answering the question, in your opinion, what affects the success of African-American males in community college can also speak to why some graduate within three years while others do not. Andre’s response was based upon personal determination. He said, “Our own willpower to be successful in the face of adversity. Also, not being something or someone we are not.” When reviewing the survey data, Andre’s response fits the data well. Keeping one’s focus was the basis for Hakeem’s response. He said in his response, “If he keeps himself focused he will have a lot of success; he will complete his goals.” He added the consequences of not staying focused saying, “If he lets the world in, he more than likely will begin to slow down on his progress. He will become lazy and less focused on
school.” The responses from these participants reflected their feelings about the internal needs of the students versus what students need from the college or what they may have missed while in grade school.

Perseus added a response that spoke of what happens to the student athlete by stating, “Fear of not fitting in and lacking confidence by only being driven by sports.” He also responded, “coming to school unprepared as a result of being passed along in grade school.” Barry’s response to this question aligned with Tinto’s (1975) theory of departure that is one of the theories guiding this research study. Tinto theorized that when a community college student is not integrated into the society of the community college, the student would withdraw from the college. Barry’s response from the questionnaire was, “The lack of knowing all the resources that are offered on the campus. Also, not building relationships and getting involved with campus life.” Samuel’s response aligned with Bean’s (1980) theory of attrition. This theory is based on the commuter student.

Bean (1980) discussed the off-campus responsibilities of the student who does not live at school. Bean theorized that if the commuter student does not see the reward of grades and completing school as enough to motivate them to continue, they would drop out. Samuel stated in his response, “The amount of fun and beneficial activities that school offers. Also proof that going to school will truly be worth it.” The perspectives given by the participants in this research study circle back to the emerging theme in this study of support. Hintz (2011) discussed commuter students feeling marginalized due to lack of connection to the campus. This support can come from campus employees, faculty, or administrators. Any of these personnel can provide the support through mentoring. This is the resource Gardenhire-Crooks et al. (2010) discussed in their article as a primary strategy that has a positive impact on graduation from a
community college for African-American males. Participants in this research study who had experiences with dropping out from a community college were able to provide perspectives and compare the two community colleges in which they had been enrolled. The remaining participants were able to give their perspectives based upon their lived experiences at this time.

**RQ2: What do African-American males need outside of the community college campus to continue to graduation?**

The two things most discussed in the data regarding needs outside the community college for African-American males were housing and money. In their article discussing homelessness and high residential mobility, Herbers, et al. (2011) discussed the homeless or highly mobile (HHM) child as one being at high risk for lacking academic skills. They also discussed that while other children may experience poverty or even extreme poverty, the HHM child comes from minority backgrounds. Additionally, they stated the HHM population might also experience adversity at higher levels than their peers along with inadequate access to nutrition, social, and physical resources.

Various participants discussed the lack of stability in the area of housing during their interviews. Andre mentioned that he attended three different middle schools due to his movement. While he began his elementary school years living with his mom, at some point he was placed in foster care. Even when living with his mom, Andre stated, “So my mom was never really there, I would live with my grandmother, and before that we were in foster care. Then I lived with a guardian.” He also talked about his school attendance being “shaky” while living with his mother. Samuel also talked about moving during his time in elementary school saying, “well I always moved a lot unfortunately.” He went on to discuss that he struggled in elementary school because each time he entered a new school “each elementary school teacher
taught her class differently.” Lyle also discussed how he coped with moving during high school. He said, “Once sophomore year came, that’s when I started moving. We moved from house to house and then it came between me either living with my friend, living with my grandma, my other friend or my sister.” The lack of stable housing continued for one participant when returning to community college after dropping out.

During his interview, Barry discussed his housing issue at length. He talked about having to move out of his apartment and back with his mom when he made the decision to enroll in the community college. The move was due to him having to cut his work hours in order to take 12 units per semester. Barry, however, stated the move was not working out well as he was going to have to cut his hours again in order to take the classes he needed next semester. He talked about his mother not being happy with him cutting his hours because she needed him to take on some of the financial responsibilities in the home. In his questionnaire responses, Barry added that in addition to housing, financial help and transportation were among what he felt were the most important needs for African-American males while enrolled in community college.

Samuel gave the response of “money” on his questionnaire when responding to the most important needs of African-American males enrolled in community college. He gave the same response along with adding “a positive support system” when asked about the resources he needed to be successful in community college. Of the nine participants, their survey responses concerning employment revealed only two were working full-time while four were working part-time. The remaining three participants reported they were unemployed.

Just as most community colleges do not provide housing, California community colleges are no different. According to the CCCCO website, of the 113 California community colleges across the state, only 10 provide some type of housing for students. All 10 of those campuses are
located in rural areas of northern California (2016). A quote from Barry discussing the need for student housing was mentioned earlier in this chapter.

**RQ3: What do African-American males need on the community college campus to continue to graduation?**

The responses to this question pointed to needs for African-American males prior to attending a community college. Perseus mentioned in his questionnaire that African-American males needed to be encouraged during the transition from high school to college. Without that encouragement, the African-American male may not continue to graduation.

Lyle responded on his questionnaire that the most important need for African-American males while in community college is financial aid. He said, “That aid provides money for books and school supplies.” When responding to his specific needs while in college he listed tutoring sessions, financial aid, and professors having office hours. Barry responded on his questionnaire about his needs in order to be successful in community college as “a strong understanding of the campus resources and a strong support system.” Barry also stated on the questionnaire that not having these resources along with not building relationships and getting involved on the campus are what affect the success of the African-American male in community college. Perseus had a similar response on his questionnaire as he mentioned his needs for success in community college as “study groups, and a resource center.” He also mentioned that the most important needs for the African-American male enrolled in community college are guidance counselors and a personal tutor. When asked during his interview to provide three specific things he would implement on a college campus for African-American males if he were president of the college, Michael replied, “There would be a specific person there for them. I don’t know of a title, but they should give encouragement and counseling to enhance education. They should also provide
When asked the same question, Malik discussed establishing a mentoring program. He then added that he would bring in men who already had their degrees such as doctors, lawyers, or accountants. He said he would have them speak to the males about how they obtained their degrees along with what they went through in their personal lives to achieve in their professions. Lastly he talked about a counselor. “Third, I would make sure there exists a continuous visiting counselor. They would have to visit the counselor consistently.” If the African-American male enrolled in community college have any one or more of these needs met, it might be the catalyst for them meeting a degree of integration into the society of the college campus and continuing to graduation which is what Tinto (1975) discussed as the basis for dropout.

The responses provided by the participants to given reasons for graduating from community college, and their needs on and off campus intersect. Support from family and members of the community college community are important. Equally important, is understanding the nuances of the community college itself both in and outside the classroom. However, having a stable place to live, reliable transportation, and the resources to get help with school work or personal issues are at the top of the list for beginning, continuing, and graduating from community college. Understanding the lived experiences and perceptions of African-American males enrolled in community college was necessary in order to explore the phenomenon of continuing to graduation. This research study was conducted to add to the body of literature in an effort to present another view of prior studies of this phenomenon. Unlike previous studies regarding African-American males enrolled in community college, this study explored the epistemological realities of the participants’ lived experiences. This was done with the intention to explore those experiences to determine strategies and resources leading not only
to academic success, but defining the academic success of African-American males in a community college as graduation.

Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher sought to hear the voice of the participants in an effort to gain understanding of the phenomena. During each interview, participants were asked if they had any additional questions or anything to add in order to assist the researcher with this effort. Below is a final statement from Barry, a participant in this research study. This was his response when the researcher asked if he had anything he would like to add that was not discussed during the interview. It provides insight to two of the themes emerging from the data, housing and support. These themes were based upon significant statements and responses from the interview, survey, and questionnaire instruments. This quote also provides a brief summary to answering all of the research questions guiding this study. These questions explored why African-American males may or may not graduate from a community college. Additionally, the research questions explored what they need on and off campus in order to continue to graduation from a community college.

I don’t know who or where this video or audio is going to go, but, if there’s any chance of a proposal or something, or a program to help housing for college students. I mean, they have housing, but it needs to be a program to where at least you know you got a 3.0, or 4.0 that its free housing . . . because I want to be here; I truly do but sometimes it makes it so hard for me to be here and its like there has to be a way for people to ask whether to pursue an education, for a career, but there’s so many barriers, you know, that we come against to where it, it, it making it look impossible some time. You know, I’ve never been a quitter, you know. Even if it’s like loss of sleep, I’m gonna find a way to continue this journey, but, just for future generations, you know somebody like myself.
There needs to be a way besides, you know, financial aid, it needs to be like, I could care less about the check. But if I could stay somewhere and it’s paid for. Or I got them to pay like $200–300, that, that would take a lot off my shoulders. You know, so, okay, I can work on campus and survive off a couple hundred of dollars. But in real life, you know, $500 a month; it’s not laughter, you got gas, you got, you know, cell phone, whatever the case may be, plus rent, you know so it makes it hard, you know; those are the main barriers why African Americans are not succeeding in this thing. Because even my class and cohort, it started off big but now we are towards the end of this semester, it’s small. And I still talk to some of the individuals outside of it, ‘You know, what’s up.’ I’ve got to work, you know. Some of them have kids, and ‘What am I supposed to do?’ They want me to go to class midday but my job is midday. My job they trying to flex me around; and if my job is flexing me around, its overnight and they’ve got to be with their kids. So you know. It’s just a lot of stimulations, but, we are trying to be accountable, you know, for the program but sometimes it’s just, I don’t like that, and the easiest way is just to be like I’m not going to go. Because you don’t, it’s, it’s not anything like a vacation. In college, you know, I mean the, the, the degree, you know, is the reward; the why, you went, you know, it’s not like you just go to class and then you are making 50 some grand a year. You know it’s not like that. That’s why people need some type of financial, or assistance more than financial aid because a person does get a financial aid check, yeah you get it but kids blow it. You know I think it needs to be something more tangible than just a check. It needs to be financial aid, housing, you know. Well, you can stay here as long as you keep your grades up; or you know, just something like that; better than just a check for $1500; you know, that’s not, I can care less about that. I need
something that’s going to stick; that is going to be a strong platform so I can hit these rocks and get to where I need to go, and that’s what I’m looking at. (Barry, 2015)

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this phenomenological study. The data collection and analysis processes were discussed. Results of the data analysis process showed themes that were also presented in this chapter. Those themes were trauma, anger, and systems of support. Additionally, the research questions guiding this study were answered through the lived experiences of the nine African-American male, community college students who volunteered for this research study. Those findings were also presented in relationship with the theoretical frameworks used for this study. Lastly, this chapter outlined the process of the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness was maintained throughout the study. The fifth and final chapter of this research study will be a discussion of the conclusions and recommendations for community college administrators and faculty along with those for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore strategies and resources leading to graduation from community college. The exploration for study along with the research and findings were derived from the lived experiences of African-American males. This chapter consists of a concise summary of the findings along with a brief discussion of the research questions. Secondly, the gaps in the literature this study helped to close are discussed. Also included in the discussion of the implications will be recommendations for community college and K-12 administrators, faculty, and staff based upon the data from the participants in this study. Lastly, this chapter will provide a brief discussion of the limitations of this study along with providing recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

There were three research questions guiding this study. The first research question sought to determine why some African American males graduated from community college while others did not. The answers to the first research question related back to the theme of support, but specifically support on the community college campus. For the participants in this study; in order to graduate from community college there needs to exist systems of support relating to understanding the demands for study time and assistance with transitioning to community college from high school. The second research question determined the needs of African American males outside the community college in order to continue to graduation. Outside the community college campus, housing and monetary support were two important needs for African-American males in order for them to graduate from community college. The
final research question in this study was to discover the needs for African-American males on the community college campus. The needs as defined by the participants included financial support; however, academic support such as tutoring along with academic counseling was mentioned as well. The needs along with the reasons for graduating or not graduating for African-American males were equally as important to many of the participants in this research study.

Discussion

The discussion section of this research study will discuss the findings of this study in relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. It will outline how the study confirmed or corroborated the previous research. Furthermore, this discussion will show how this study diverged from or extended on previous research. Finally, this section will outline contributions to the field of research.

Chapter Two of this research study presented research concerning systemic failures in K-12 education. One of those failures discussed was school discipline. In the research from Ferguson (2001), Holtzman (2011), and Jordan (2008), it was reported that African-American males were disproportionately subjected to school discipline. Additionally, not only were those disciplinary measures more severe, African-American males were disciplined for subjective versus objective reasons. According to the survey data from this research study, eight of the nine participants reported being suspended. Malik discussed in his interview being suspended and at one time that suspension led to him being expelled from middle school. Barry reported that the only reason he was not expelled when reporting to court for his hearing, was that he was an athlete. The only participant who reported never being suspended or expelled was Michael, who stated his age as 61 years old. This time missed in school means that there was time missed in
the classroom-learning environment. While all of these participants are currently enrolled in community college, any gaps in their K-12 learning may have been revealed in their community college assessment scores.

In the survey data for this research study, only two of the nine participants reported they did not have to enroll in a remedial math or English course. Four of the nine participants reported they had to enroll in a remedial English course and the remaining three a remedial math course. As stated in the literature for this study, Finkelstein and Fong (2008) reported that African-American students are placed in remediation courses at a significantly higher rate than Caucasian students. Bean (1980) asserted in his attrition theory that in taking longer to graduate, a student might lose focus due to not seeing the benefit of taking courses not leading to graduation. This loss of reward may result in departure from the community college unless the African-American male garners the support he needs to assist him in his endeavor to graduate.

As stated in Chapter Two, a critical factor in continuing to graduation for the African-American male enrolled in community college was obtaining and maintaining support. The data in this research study confirmed the importance of support. The data also revealed that support could come from family and friends or someone on campus. Perseus discussed during his interview that it was feeling as if the support system at... was real. He talked about dropping out during his first enrollment at another community college after completing only one semester due to only getting to know one counselor on that campus. Barry discussed that the support he received from a community college administrator being what caused him to enroll after previously dropping out of another community college. He said that no matter what question he threw at the administrator, he not only had an answer, but a solution. Malik stated in his interview that he would begin a mentoring program for African-American male students as his
“number one” program if he were the president of the college. Hakeem stated the African-American male needs “a good support system behind him as he starts his quest to complete his goals.” When discussing the support African-American males need on the community college campus, Michael discussed the obstacles African-American males face today as being “extraordinarily great.” He would go on to discuss the type of support needed saying, “I can’t say if I would have done well if I had those obstacles that some of these African-American kids face today.” He continued saying, “But they just need that someone. I mean it could probably come from a counselor, but rarely do you get counselors of that caliber.” As Michael continued, he talked about a Miss Bennett (not her real name) along with what happens when support is missing.

You know, I said Miss Bennett is unique in herself. But rarely do you get that. And I think that’s the missing link. The missing link that will cause them to be discouraged and they don’t have anybody to get them saying ‘Oh come on. Don’t give up.’ You know what I’m saying? But I don’t know of a title. But I think it’s pretty much of a necessity to have someone of that caliber within the school. (Michael, 2015)

Support resonated throughout the data. Not only in the form of personal support but also academic support.

On the questionnaire instrument for this research study, Barry, Perseus, Lyle, and Roy all stated that African-American males needed tutoring and support while in community college. In the themes that emerged from the data in this study, support included learning how to navigate in the community college setting that included the need for support to learn effective study habits. Andre talked that needing help with transitioning from college was important during his interview. He talked about the responsibility shifting from the teachers to the students in college.
Barry mentioned on his questionnaire that he needed a “strong understanding of the campus resources.” The majority of the participants discussed only spending an hour or two daily studying outside of class. None of them discussed having a specific study plan in place. Malik even mentioned studying while on the freeway going to work, while Perseus and Andre who are student-athletes discussed how they have to fit it in due to their athletic practice requirements. Garnering support on and off campus is important. However, additional support to help acknowledge and subsequently deal with the effects from traumatic experiences may also be necessary.

The literature in Chapter Two of this research study did not address trauma or anger. However, these were the most discussed themes that emerged from the data. Each of the nine participants openly discussed traumatic experiences in their lives. Those traumatic experiences included the loss of a parent, abuse by a parent, divorce, witnessing the abuse of a parent, and the incarceration of a parent and sibling. As the participants discussed their traumatic experiences, anger also emerged. Most of the anger revolved around poor relationships with their fathers. In his (2009) book *Life, Without the Father: A Man’s Guide to Fatherhood*, Stewart reiterates this point about fathers stating “It is not society’s fault for what we develop (or don’t develop) in our children. It is the lack of a father in a household that causes all the failures we see in our cities” (p. 78). He goes on to state, “Income status will not matter; it’s just that low-income people’s social failures seem to surface earlier in life, and are magnified by society” (p. 78).

Whether anger stems from family situations or relationships, it can have an impact on the health of the African-American student. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) in their book, *How College Affects Students*, health has a direct relationship to educational attainment. They discussed health in various measures including psychological indicators, self-evaluation,
and mortality rates. Also included in their discussion were factors affecting health such as economic and family circumstances. Rovai et al. (2007) whose book *Closing the African American Achievement Gap* looked at reasons and solutions for the African-American achievement gap in higher education and discussed how health affects human capital. They stated “research also shows a positive correlation between completion of higher education and good health another factor that increases human capital.” In discussing the Becker (1994) human capital theory, Rovai et al. suggested that increasing human capital among African-American students leads to them making every attempt to maximize their earnings as employees in part due to being in good health. These authors reported that for college graduates earning between $35,000 and $54,999 annually, 73% of them report being in very good or excellent health.

Community college personnel may not have the capacity to provide the resources to help African Americans with their anger or bridge a father-son relationship gap. However, providing academic and personal support to African-American males can assist them in graduating from a community college thus closing the achievement gap in higher education. Delivering this support can also impact their ability to become effective and productive in the labor market.

Although these issues were not addressed in the literature of this research study, the data derived from the lived experiences of the participants reflects the need for counseling at the community college. This counseling should address not only academic issues, but those relating to mental health as well. It was also the data from this phenomenological study that had a direct correlation to two of the three theoretical frameworks guiding this study. These frameworks included Tinto’s (1975) theory of departure, which discussed the community college student who will drop out if not integrated into the society of the community college. Bean’s (1980) theory of attrition focused on the commuter student who does not reside on the community college
campus. Bean also addressed the external responsibilities of the commuter student outweighing the reward of grades as a factor in a student withdrawing from community college. Bell’s (1977) critical race theory (CRT) addressed racism experienced by minority students experienced on the campus of educational institutions.

Tinto (1975) discussed campus involvement as the determining factor for a student continuing their enrollment in a community college. All of the participants who volunteered for this research study reported some type of involvement on the community college campus. Perseus, Andre, Samuel, and Hakeem are student athletes. Andre is on the track team while the others play football. Andre was the only student-athlete who did not mention athletics as his means to transfer to a four-year university. However, he did express that desire in his survey response. Samuel discussed not continuing in athletics when transferring. He made it clear during his interview that he was relying on his grades to get him monies to attend a four-year university. Perseus did not mention the college he desires to transfer to upon graduation, but he did discuss playing football at a four-year university along with football being the source for a scholarship, as his family did not have the finances to afford sending him to college. Hakeem mentioned transferring to University of Oregon and playing football after leaving the community college. During his interview, he mentioned that the only reason he was at the community college was due to his junior year GPA being poor as a result of having his entire class schedule consist of AP and honors courses. He talked about that schedule “piling too much” on him. The remaining participants reported being a part of some program on campus.

Barry, Roy, and Lyle were a part of a program at the college targeting first-year students when they began attending the college. Although they have completed more than a semester in college as full-time students, which is at least 12 credits, they will remain in the program as first-
year students due to some of those credits coming from remediation courses. Roy also discussed utilizing the services on campus for students with special needs as he was in special education courses for almost all of his K-12 education years. Barry, who discussed his connection to Mr. Smith at the college who oversees the program, was given the opportunity to provide the name of a study group for the males in the program. The name of the group is BROTHERS, Brothers Reaching Out To Help Everyone Reach Success. This group, according to Barry, meets for study sessions, work together and help each other with assignments, and has regular meetings on campus. Malik and Michael, both veterans, utilize the Veteran Resource Center on the campus. Michael also works there part-time as a student worker. Michael was the only participant who reported not attending college during summer sessions. Additionally, all nine participants reported on their survey they chose their courses based upon an education plan they received from visiting the counseling office. They all also reported on their survey they are attending the community college on a full-time basis taking at least 12 credits per semester. All nine participants also reported on their survey they have chosen a college major. Of the nine, Michael was the only participant who stated he was not going to transfer to a four-year college or university upon graduation from the community college. Malik was the only participant who stated his transfer to a four-year university would not happen immediately after graduating from the community college. All of the participants in this research study are integrated in some manner into the community college society. If they are able to manage their lives off campus, these nine African-American males may succeed in continuing to graduation from the community college.

Bean’s (1980) theory of attrition was an additional framework guiding this qualitative research study. While Bean looked at factors leading to student departure from community
college, unlike Tinto (1975), his theory was centered on the off campus life of the commuter student. According to Bean (1980), if the reward of academic excellence as determined by the GPA of a student did not outweigh the challenges a student faced off campus such as employment, housing, transportation, and family issues, the student would withdraw from college. The data from this study revealed that many of the challenges faced by the participants occurred off campus. The theme of trauma that emerged in this study indicated that the traumatic experiences each of the nine participants faced occurred in their personal lives.

Additionally, the theme of anger also revealed situations that occurred off campus. However, the theme of support did show a need for academic and on-campus support in addition to support off campus. From the survey data, Lyle is the only participant who reported being employed full time. Andre, Hakeem, and Roy reported being unemployed, while Perseus, Malik, Samuel, Barry, and Michael reported working part-time.

From the questionnaire responses, Perseus, Samuel, Barry, Lyle, Roy, and Andre all responded their financial assistance was a necessity in order to achieve success while in community college. The most noted summary of the challenges faced off campus in the data was from Barry. His direct quote regarding the need for housing for African-American males enrolled in community college can be found in Chapter Four. Barry discussed this need at the end of his interview during which he disclosed the challenges he faced with not being able to maintain his apartment due to his school schedule. He chose to cut his work hours in order to attend the community college full-time. As a result, he had to move home with his mother; however, the move was not advantageous. In his discussion, Barry spoke of being a male and not seeking a hand out, but also needing assistance as he had a strong desire to complete his education. The data revealed off-campus challenges the participants faced in their lives;
however, despite these challenges, all of the participants revealed their desire to continue to graduation from the community college. While all of the participants in this research study were African-American males, they did not see their ethnicity or experiences as African-American males as a challenge in continuing to graduation from a community college.

The third theoretical framework in the study was Bell’s (1977) Critical Race Theory (CRT). In his theory, Bell addressed racism experienced by minority males on the campus of the educational institution. There were no themes emerging from the data regarding racism experienced on the community college campus by the participants in this research study. When asking the participants about how they feel being an African-American male at the current community college has affected their educational experience, there were only positive responses. Roy talked about not encountering any racism on campus, and Hakeem also said he did not feel as if being African American affected his education experience on campus. Malik discussed knowing that while he might be looked at as different, he felt he was still accepted on campus. Hakeem stated, “being an African-American male puts a lot of pressure on me, I have to be successful because I do not want anyone else to label me as a statistic.” Barry made the comparison of staff at his former community college with that of the current college. “Being at this college is a good thing for me seeing all the African-American staff here, because at the other college I only saw about two African-American professors. Never did I see any African-American men in high positions there.” He talked about seeing the African-American men at this community college lets him know that “it’s a reality you can do this and they will have the solution to your problems if you ask them.” There was nothing discussed by the participants during the interviews about lived experiences with racism on this community college campus. Bell’s (1977) CRT was not supported by the lived experiences of
the participants in this qualitative study. The participants discussed their challenges and experiences and those themes aligned with the theories of Bean (1980) and Tinto (1975) along with literature reviewed in this research study.

Bean’s (1980) theory of attrition emerged as the theory that aligned with the data stronger than that of Tinto or Bell. As Barry discussed in his quote in chapter four about housing and based upon Andre discussing the need for support with the transition from high school to community college, it is the needs of African American males off campus that weighs more heavily in their ability to continue to graduation. All of the participants in this study were integrated into the society of the community college campus through sports, utilizing campus resources, or as members of a campus organization. However, only three were employed with only one working on campus. On his questionnaire response, Roy discussed the need for additionally financial assistance in order to purchase books and supplies. This theory was the strongest supported in this research study that sought to explore the phenomenon of continuing to graduation for African American males enrolled in community college.

This research was able to give inquiry to determine what nurtures and inspires African-American males to continue to graduation from community college. This study was conducted through the epistemological lens of the participants’ lived experiences in which there was a gap in the literature. Additionally, previous research—Allen, 1986; Harper, 2009; and Rovai et al., 2007—focused on the reasons African-American males were unsuccessful in their attempt to graduate from community college. This now adds to the body of research providing inquiry to other cultures (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993; Crisp, Nora, & Taggart, 2009). In conducting a research study through the lived experiences of African-American males, this study closed a gap in the literature as it discussed the significance of exploring strategies and resources
leading to graduation from community college for African-American males through their lived experiences. One of the most important reasons for not only understanding this phenomena, but implementing strategies and resources in order to increase the African American male community college graduation rate, is the positive economic impact these men can have during their life time.

Gaining an understanding of this phenomenon will provide community college faculty and administrators insight as to why only 17% of African-American males enrolled in a community college will obtain an associates degree in six years or less while the population of students enrolled in community colleges was 7.4 million (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2013; ). It will also provide insight to the California Community Colleges Chancellors Office that reported from 2008-20014, only 36.8% of African-American males enrolled in California Community Colleges graduated. Gaining this insight along with meeting the needs related to the themes presented from the data in this study can also have a significant national economic impact. According to a 2014 study conducted on the economic impact of community colleges, taxpayers receive a 14.3% rate of return on every dollar they invest to support a student in community college. Furthermore, there is a $285.7 billion benefit to taxpayers due to tax revenue from the earnings over a lifetime and output from businesses from students graduating from a community college (EMS Intl, 2014).

**Implications**

The significance of this qualitative research study was to provide the voice of the lived experiences of African-American males. The focus was to explore strategies and resources leading to graduation from community college. The researchers’ intent was to present the meanings and essence of the shared along with individual experiences of the participants
The study was significant due to the data revealing recommendations of strategies and resources for community college and K-12 faculty and administrators based upon the lived experiences of their current and possible future students. The recommendations addressed the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications from the study. Should K-12 and/or community college administrators choose to implement any of these recommendations, they can serve to address the research questions in this study. Additionally, the theoretical frameworks grounding this study of Tinto (1975) and Bean (1980) will also be addressed.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this study included all participants were from one community college. Additionally, the community college was located in one southern California County. This study was also limited to no more than nine participants. All community college participants in this study were attending classes solely during the morning and early afternoon. Lastly, this study was limited to participants who were 18 years of age or older.

**Recommendation for Future Research**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore strategies and resources leading to graduation from a community college for African-American males. The recommendations resulted solely from the lived experiences of the participants in this research study. These recommendations provide information to community college faculty, counselors, and administrators along with administrators in the K-12 system. Below are strategies and resources that can assist African-American males in graduating from community college as resulting from the data from this research study.

The first recommendation from the data was to establish mental health counseling programs while simultaneously training current community college academic counselors in areas
of grief, abuse, and life skills’ individual and group counseling. In order to keep costs for this type of program at a minimum for the college, marriage and family therapy (MFT) and licensed practicing clinical counseling (LPCC) interns from local colleges and universities who need to complete state mandated internship hours as a requirement for their degree and licensure could serve as counselors. During the interview portion of the data collection process both Malik and Michael were asked to give three programs or resources they would provide to African-American males on a community college campus. These two participants were asked this question as they were the oldest participants and had more real world experience than other participants.

Malik – “I would make sure that there exists a continuous visiting counselor and they would visit the counselor consistently.”

Michael – “I can’t say I would have done well if I had those obstacles some African American kids face today. They just need someone. It could probably come from a counselor, but rarely do you get counselors of that caliber.”

Providing mental health counseling on the community college campus can support African-American males in their endeavor to continue to graduation from community college by assisting them with resolving issues and concerns in their lives that could serve as barriers in their academic achievement, thus hindering or not preventing them from graduating. Obtaining information about experiences that might be affecting the mental and emotional health of African-American males should occur during the transition from high school to the community college campus.

The next recommendation based upon the data from this research study is to have K-12 schools send student cumulative files to the community college once their graduates begin
attending classes. This is a lofty recommendation for K-12 and community college systems; however, based upon modern technology, records can be transferred electronically. This recommendation stems from the themes that emerged from this data. Every traumatic experience discussed by the participants in this research study occurred before graduation from high school. Counselors on the community college campus can receive training (if necessary) and review the files of incoming students for lived experiences of incoming students that may present as barriers to graduation. Possessing this information can then provide the college with information necessary to give African-American males strategies and resources necessary to lead to graduation from a community college. Having information about the lived experiences of African-American males prior to them beginning classes on the community college campus can be the beginning of the support the participants need to continue to graduation.

The final recommendation from the data is adding a mandatory component into the high school curriculum to include pre-college processes. These processes include completing federal and state financial aid forms, assessment test-taking techniques, college application completion, and a tour of local community colleges. While on the tour of the college, expectations of students regarding study time and time management and organization strategies can be addressed along with general assignment completion, obtaining assistance, and developing effective study habits. When asked a question regarding his first community college experience and why he did not succeed in graduating, Malik responded, “I didn’t really have anyone to guide me on what I should do. I really didn’t know how to apply for financial aid or going to any other educational assistance.” The final theme of support emerging from the data in this study also revealed the lack of capacity to navigate on the community college campus. Barry stated on his questionnaire that he needed “a strong understanding of the community college campus resources.” The theme
also revealed the participants in this study did not have effective study habits. Andre said when talking about the transition to community college from high school, “The transition is different because everybody looks at you as you are grown. It’s not like the teachers are holding your hand, it’s your money and your responsibility.” Having a pre-college course or even a unit of lessons in high school can serve as establishing the foundation for the African-American male gaining the capacity to continue to graduation from a community college. All of the recommendations that resulted from the data in this study stemmed from the themes emerging from the data. However, this data was based solely on the lived experiences of the nine participants who volunteered for this research study.

In consideration of the findings from this research study, and the limitations placed on the study, there are several recommendations for future research. The recommendations provided in this research study are important as they provide educators and administrators at community colleges the needs of African-American males. Those needs are expressed not on the thoughts or feelings of the researcher nor are they surmised in statistical data. These recommendations are based solely on the data collected in this research study from the lived experiences of African-American males who are currently enrolled in community college. This addition to the limited body of literature removes assumptions of educators and others who make decisions or based those decisions on numerical data alone.

The first recommendation is to conduct this qualitative phenomenological study using African-American females as participants. An expansion of this current study could also be conducted to include additional community colleges across other parts of California or, if possible, in other states. Additionally, the study could also be expanded to include or focus on African-American male students attending community colleges in rural areas. Continuation to
graduation from community college could also be researched comparing African-American male students who attend classes during morning and afternoon with those who only attend at night. A longitudinal study conducted could research the continuance to graduation for African-American male students from a community college who were enrolled in a high school bridge program partnering with a local community college. Furthermore, any one of these studies recommended could include participants under the age of 18 and, where applicable, high school students attending traditional high school programs.

Conducting future research about African-American males continuing to graduation from community college will broaden the current body of research by adding perspectives and lived experiences of African-American males. One of the themes that emerged from this study was trauma. However, this study did not address this issue from the literature. The experiences of the participants who volunteered for this research study as related to trauma along with the outcomes from those traumatic experiences proved a major gap in this study that should have been addressed. Exploring the issue of trauma will present a bigger picture in determining not only academic and external needs for African-American males in order for them to continue to graduation from a community college, but their internal mental and emotional health needs as well. Learning about trauma in this research study was one of my greatest gains in this study. This insight into the lives of the participants in this study allowed me to also see the gaps in teacher education and administrator education programs. As community college instructors and administrators may not have formal training in the area of mental health before entering the community college system as an employee, this is yet an additional gap between those working in the system and the students who are the end user of the system. This study provided a picture
for community college faculty and administrators, along with those in the K-12 system, to have a greater understanding of the needs of African-American males enrolled in community college.

While this study presented findings concerning the needs of African American males in their effort to continue to graduation from community college, this study also provides evidence for its replication among Latino, Native American, Pacific Islander, and other minority groups. Additionally, studies for females in these minority groups seeking to continue to graduation from community college should also be researched. Community college faculty and administrators would be well served to determine the needs of all underserved and underperforming groups both male and female in urban, suburban, and rural community colleges.

Summary

Chapter One of this qualitative research study provided the problem and significance of this study. The problem according to Lee and Ransom (2010) was that more African-American males are going to prison, unemployed, or dying from means other than disease than are graduating from community college. According to Bush and Bush (2005), the community college may be the sole opportunity for post secondary education for the African-American male. The significance of this study was twofold. First, it was exploring graduation from community college for African-American males in an effort to meet the vision of President Barack Obama. In a 2009 speech, he introduced an initiative supported by billions of dollars with a goal to have the United States represent the world by having the greatest number of college graduates by 2020. Second, on a global economic level, increasing the graduation rate of African-American males from community college contributes to the $46.4 billion dollars saved in reducing the crime rate along with lowering the welfare and unemployment rate in the United States (EMS Intl.). Chapter Two of this study provided an overview of literature including the three
theoretical frameworks guiding this study. Chapter Three introduced the design, participants, data collection methods, and analysis process for this phenomenological study. It provided information about the setting and research procedures. Also included in the chapter were the role of the researcher and research on the data collection instruments. Lastly, the chapter provided an overview of how trustworthiness in the study would be maintained along with the ethical considerations for the study. It also presented the information that would be provided in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four presented the data collection procedures, analysis processes, emerging themes, and answers to the research questions guiding this study. The themes emerging from the data collected from the lived experiences of the nine African-American males who volunteered for this study were (a) Trauma, (b) Anger, and (c) Support. The themes along with answers to the research questions interconnected. While the participants had no prior knowledge of the data collection instruments, responses to various questions were similar in several areas. The next chapter completed the overview of the findings.

Chapter Five was comprised of a concise summary of the findings along with a brief discussion of the research questions. It also addressed the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of this research study. Included in this chapter was a discussion of the implications and recommendations for community college administrators and faculty. Lastly, this chapter provided a brief discussion of the limitations of this study along with providing recommendations for future research.

In providing the implications stated in this chapter, my feelings about decisions made concerning the education of future generations was realized. The data outcomes from this study provided the recommendations for educators and policy makers. For several years as a teacher,
counselor, and administrator, I have found it extremely unfortunate that the voices of those we are serving are not only dismissed, they are not even solicited. This study was conducted as a qualitative study in order to solicit those voices versus presenting statistics from a quantitative study. Schools might have students included on various auxiliary committees in an effort to gain “student voice.” However, there is a non-existent conversation at decision-making tables of curriculum, strategies, and program implementation. The conversation is that of educators inquiring from students, their thoughts and feelings based upon their lived experiences in order to learn the needs of students in the very systems they spend years in as the end-users of those services. Conducting this study provided not only opinions of changes needed in the field of education, but also insight into the how the researcher views their career, colleagues, and most importantly students.

Impressing me most about this study was the oneness in the voices of nine participants who were never in the same room together and had no idea of what they would be asked during the data collection process. The similarities in their responses as to not only their needs and their lived experiences, but what those lived experiences showed that African-American males enrolled in community college needed was interesting, yet disheartening. The openness and honesty in their responses on the instruments for a female researcher they never met left me with a sense that they desire nothing more than to have their voices heard. In conducting this study, this researcher earnestly hoped to not hear shallow complaints about classes or instructors not “liking” the participants. The researcher also did want to hear assumptions about unsubstantiated and unmerited prejudice from employees, faculty, and administrators. The participants never spoke using such shallow descriptions when discussing their experiences and perceptions. Instead, it was their lived experiences and perceptions that provided an understanding of not only
the desire of African-American males to graduate from community college, but also their needs on and off the community college campus.

There was and continues to exist the sincere hope of this researcher that the lived experiences derived from the data collection process in this research study serves as more than just words on paper to the administrators, faculty, and staff of the community college. In conducting this qualitative phenomenological study versus a quantitative study, this researcher gained insight as to how tasks conducted in future work needs to look beyond statistics. In order to truly understand and assist African-American males with strategies and resources leading to graduation from community college, educators must be willing to not only hear their voice and not dismiss what is stated by this demographic, but also take immediate action to meet their stated needs enrolled in community college that will lead to graduation.
REFERENCES


doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01534.x


http://www.federalstudentaid.gov


*Journal of African American Studies*, 1-14.

## APPENDIX A

### Interview Protocol

### Interview Question Outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R1: Why do some African American males persist to graduation from a community college within three years while others do not?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Please give me a description of your feelings when you first began attending community college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How supportive do you believe instructors are of African American male students at this community college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Who or what plays an important role in your life that contributes to your graduation while in college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How supportive are family or other adults of you attending college? In what ways do they support you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R2: What do African American males need on the community college campus to persist to graduation?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Are you comfortable asking questions in your classes? Why or why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How often do you go to your instructors during their office hours for assistance? Secondly, do you obtain the assistance you need?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How do you feel your gender affects your education experiences at this community college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How do you feel being African American affects your education experiences at this community college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. How supportive do you believe employees who work on campus are of African American males at this community college?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R3: What do African American males need outside the community college campus to persist to graduation?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. How many hours per day do you spend completing class assignments and studying outside of class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do you feel this is enough time based on your other obligations outside of school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Considering your responsibilities outside of school, do you find it challenging to continue your education? Why or why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How different are you treated by your peers who attend college than your peers who do not attend college?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Survey Protocol

Demographic Questions

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?

Family

3. Are you married?
4. Do you have any children?
   a. Yes
   b. No
5. How many siblings do you have?
   a. 
   b. I do not have any siblings
6. If you have any siblings, have any of them graduated from or have a certification from:
   a. A community college
   b. A four-year college
   c. None of the above
   d. I do not have any siblings
7. What is the highest level of education your mother obtained?
   a. A high school diploma or GED
   b. A community college certification
   c. A community college degree
   d. A four-year college degree
e. A masters degree

**Demographic Questions**

8. What is your name?

9. What is your age?

**Family**

10. Are you married?

11. Do you have any children?
   a. Yes
   b. No

12. How many siblings do you have?
   a. 
   b. I do not have any siblings

13. If you have any siblings, have any of them graduated from or have a certification from:
   a. A community college
   b. A four-year college
   c. None of the above
   d. I do not have any siblings

14. What is the highest level of education your mother obtained?
   a. A high school diploma or GED
   b. A community college certification
   c. A community college degree
   d. A four-year college degree
   e. A masters degree
f. A doctorate degree

15. What is the highest level of education your father obtained?
   a. A high school diploma or GED
   b. A community college certification
   c. A community college degree
   d. A four-year college degree
   e. A masters degree
   f. A doctorate degree
   g. Unknown

16. If you have siblings, are any of them currently attending college?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. I do not have any siblings

17. What is your current living situation?
   a. Live at home with parent/guardian/family member(s)
   b. Rent a room or apartment
   c. In a program that provides housing and/or meals
   d. Other

18. Are you or have you ever been in a foster home?
   a. Yes
   b. No
Employment Status

19. What is your current work status?
   a. Full time (more than 32 hours per week)
   b. Part time (15-32 hours per week)
   c. Less than 15 hours per week
   d. Not currently employed

20. Do you have a person whom you consider a mentor specifically to help you with your education?
   a. Yes, and he is an African American male
   b. Yes, and he is male, but not African American
   c. Yes
   d. No

21. Have you ever been suspended or expelled from school?
   a. Suspended
   b. Expelled
   c. Both
   d. I have been suspended or expelled from school

Community College Success

22. Have you chosen a college major?
   a. Yes
   b. No
23. Is this the first community college you have attended?
   a. Yes
   b. No

24. How long have you been attending this community college?
   a. Less than one year
   b. One to two years
   c. Two to three years
   d. More than three years

25. Do you attend college during the summer sessions?
   a. I attend one summer session
   b. I attend both summer sessions
   c. I do not attend school during the summer sessions

26. Do you receive any of the following financial aid resources:
   a. I only receive a BOGG fee waiver
   b. I receive a BOGG fee waiver and a full PELL grant
   c. I receive a BOGG fee waiver, a full PELL grant and work-study
   d. I receive a BOGG fee waiver and a partial PELL grant
   e. I am responsible for paying all of my tuition and fees
   f. Other

27. Does anyone in your family support you financially so that you can attend college?
   (Does anyone assist you with paying for your books, fees, money for transportation)?
   a. Yes a family member supports me
   b. Yes, but the person is not a family member
c. No

28. When you completed the assessment test, did the results show you had to:
   a. Enroll in at least one remedial math course
   b. Enroll in at least one remedial English course
   c. You did not have to enroll in any remedial math or English course

29. Are you actively utilizing any of the following campus resources:
   a. STAR Program
   b. EPOS
   c. CARE
   d. Computer lab for completing class assignments
   e. DSPS
   f. Valley Bound
   g. Cal Works
   h. First Year Experience
   i. I do not utilize any campus resources

30. Do you participate in any of the following:
   a. Campus athletics
   b. Campus club (Tuanimi or other club)
   c. Student government
   d. None of the above

31. What is your current cumulative GPA:
   a. 3.50 or higher
   b. 3.00 to 3.9
c. 2.50 to 3.00

d. 2.00 to 2.49

e. Below 2.00

f. I do not know my current cumulative GPA

32. What was your GPA for the last semester you completed:

a. 3.50 or higher

b. 3.00 to 3.9

c. 2.50 to 3.00

d. 2.00 to 2.49

e. Below 2.00

f. I do not know my GPA for the last semester I completed

33. What was your GPA when you graduated from high school:

a. 3.50 or higher

b. 3.00 to 3.9

c. 2.50 to 3.00

d. 2.00 to 2.49

e. Below 2.00

f. I do not know/remember my GPA from high school

34. Do you attend college full or part time?

a. Full time taking more than 12 units in a semester

b. Full time taking 12 units in a semester

c. Part time taking nine to 12 units in a semester

d. Part time taking six to nine units in a semester
e. Part time taking only one course a semester

35. Do you choose the classes you want to take each semester or does someone help you choose your classes?
   a. I choose my classes on my own because I have a degree plan from the counseling office
   b. I get someone off campus to help me choose my classes
   c. I choose my classes on my own

36. Do you work on or off campus while attending college?
   a. I work full time on campus
   b. I work part time on campus
   c. I work full time off campus
   d. I work part time off campus
   e. I am not currently working

37. How many African American male instructors have you had while attending this community college?
   a. I have not had any African American male instructors
   b. 1-2
   c. 2-3
   d. More than 3

38. How many units of study have you completed?

39. Do you plan to transfer to a four-year university?
   a. Yes, I plan to immediately transfer to a four-year university
b. I will transfer to a four-year university, but not right after graduating community college

c. I will not transfer to a four-year university
APPENDIX C

Questionnaire Protocol

1. How well do you think African American males are performing in community college?

   Prompt: If you were informed African American males were dropping out of community college, and you were asked why this is happening, what would be your response?

2. What do you feel are the most important needs for African American males while enrolled in community college?

   Prompt: These needs can be things or people on or off campus

3. In your opinion, what affects the success of African American males in community college?

   Prompt: What about the campus environment and culture? The academics? Family background? Relationships with instructors or others who work on campus?

4. What resources do you need to be successful in community college?

   Prompt: These can include anything or anyone on or off campus
APPENDIX D

Bracketing My Experience

My work in the field of education spans over 19 years. My first position was as an on-campus suspension supervisor. My most recent position I held was as a central office administrator for a statewide charter school with over 50 programs across California. In every position, the student population I served was high minority, and underrepresented populations including adult learners, former high school dropouts, foster, and current or former incarcerated youth and young adults. I have worked in education on both the east coast in Philadelphia, and west coast in California. Currently, I am completing my Educational Doctorate in Leadership at Liberty University. I completed my Education Specialist degree in Leadership from Liberty in 2014. I obtained a Master’s degree in Counseling and Guidance from California State University, San Bernardino and one in Education Administration from National University. With those two degrees, I also received my Pupil Personnel Services credential – a requirement to work as a school counselor and my Administrative Services credential for K-12 administration. My Bachelor of Arts in Behavioral Science was completed at California Polytechnic University Pomona. In obtaining this degree, I earned my Designated Subjects Teaching Credential allowing me to teach areas in vocational education. When making the decision to pursue a career in education, I knew I did not desire to teach core subjects. While I attended college immediately after high school and again while in the U.S. Air Force, both attempts resulted in my dropping out of college. When I finally began attending college with the intent to graduate, I began and completed my Associate’s degree in Liberal Arts from Mount San Antonio College.
As the human instrument, I am completing the transcendental phenomenological study in my voice. As I began this study, I knew my voice would be influenced by my past experiences, thought processes, and direct knowledge through my work duties in various positions and as a graduate of a community college. My initial opinions about community college developed as a high school student growing up in Philadelphia during the early 1980s. At that time, if one attended one of the two local community colleges, they were viewed as not being intelligent. My siblings attended four-year universities, as did my close friends during that time. While my dad earned his Associate’s degree during my childhood, it was from a four-year college.

It was not until moving to California that I set foot on a community college campus. I was working for a financial company and needed to complete a typing course as an employment requirement. While completing the course, I met a woman and we decided to complete our business degrees at the college. After taking a few courses I dropped out and would not return to college again for three years.

When I finally decided to return to college to complete a degree, I enrolled at a community college. I was unaware of the processes for obtaining classes, completing financial aid, campus resources, transferring, or finding my way to my classes. The main difference between a student entering community college immediately after graduation and me was that I was 28 years old. I was an adult who knew how to communicate with other adults, how to advocate for myself, and most importantly; I was not afraid or embarrassed to ask students or employees questions. One thing I began to hear from students on the campus was that they had been attending the community college for two, three, four, and even five years and were still not able to graduate.
As I began to advocate for myself on the campus, as an adult, I was able to establish rapport with instructors, counselors, and other employees in offices. This allowed me to obtain the assistance and resources necessary to continue and transfer to a four-year university in two years. On occasion in the first few years after transferring, I would see other students I had met at the community college. They were still attending. This included a female student who was only a year younger than I am and who began attending before I enrolled.

What I realized as I began this study, and reflected on my life as a college student was that I had been the college student who aligned with Tinto’s (1975) theory of departure. I departed from college on two occasions due to not integrating myself in the society of the campus during my previous attempts at completing college both at the two-year and four-year colleges. Another reason for my withdrawal from community college was my challenge with factors outside the campus including family and work commitments. These issues are the basis of Bean’s (1980) theory of attrition that focuses on the community college student as a commuter student having responsibilities off campus that exceed the reward of completing community college. This reflection, processing, and scribing of my experiences allowed me to listen with intention as an explorer, analyze the data, and complete this study without biases.
APPENDIX E

Original Open Codes and Clusters

ORIGINAL CODES

1. Stable home conducive to studying
2. Traumatic life experience
3. Poor father/son relationship
4. Choosing sports over academics
5. No academic support upon graduation from high school
6. No financial support upon graduation from high school
7. Getting suspended or expelled
8. Experiencing racism on campus
9. Transitioning from high school to community college
10. Not understanding community college campus
11. Feeling supported by instructors
12. Feeling supported by campus staff
13. Family members support community college attendance
14. Relationships with friends/family not in college
15. Behavior in grade school
16. Involvement in campus activities
17. Employment on or off campus
18. Responsibilities outside of college
19. Anger
20. African American male mentor/support
21. Multiple K-12 schools

22. Asking questions in class

23. Remedial classes in community college

24. Dropping out of college

ORIGINAL CLUSTERS

1. Anger - leading to or stemming from
   1a. Suspensions and expulsions
   1b. Being enrolled in special education courses
   1c. Poor behavior in school
   1d. Dropping out of community college

2. Poor father/son relationship
   2a. Physical abuse
   2b. Father absent from home
   2c. Father lacks any postsecondary education

3. Excelling in sports versus academics
   3a. Team building and life skills attainment
   3b. Financing of education

4. Study habits
   4a. Spending little or no time studying
   4b. Lack of stability in school
   4c. Transition from structured to unstructured learning environment (high school to college)
   4d. Student-Athlete
5. Housing

5a. Lack of stable housing (K-12 thru community college)

5b. Home environment not conducive to achieving academic success
APPENDIX F

Liberty University’s IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 24, 2015

Yvette R. Thomas
IRB Approval 2364.112415: Exploring Strategies and Resources Leading to Graduation for African American Males Enrolled in Community College

Dear Yvette,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School
APPENDIX G

Liberty University's Consent form

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 11/24/15 to 11/23/16
Protocol # 2364.112415

CONSENT FORM
Exploring Strategies and Resources Leading to Graduation for African American Males Enrolled in Community College
Yvette Thomas
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of African American male perspectives about community college. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an African American male continuing your education. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Yvette Thomas, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is better understand the resources African American males need to graduate from a community college.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1.) Electronically complete a 10-15 minute short survey about your school experiences
2.) Electronically complete a 20-30 minute questionnaire consisting of only four
3.) Participate in a one-time, 40-60 minute individual interview regarding perspectives of graduating from a community college. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:
The risks in this study are not more than you would encounter in everyday life.

There are no direct benefits to participation in this study; however, the societal benefit of participation in this study is a better understanding of African-American males persisting to graduation from a community college for K-12 and community college educators, staff, and administrators.

Compensation:
You will receive a ten-dollar ($10.00) cash gift card for taking part in this study. You will receive the gift card after all instruments have been fully completed and the completion has been verified. You will be contacted via email to determine a time to obtain your gift card. There will not be any compensation if any of the procedures stated above have not been completed in their entirety.
Confidentiality:

The records of this study, including audio recordings, will be kept private. All participants will be given pseudonyms. Electronic surveys and questionnaires will be stored in my (Yvette Thomas’s) password-protected personal computer. Other than the trusted transcriber, no other party will access the interview audio recordings. All data will be deleted at the end of three years. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact me (Yvette Thomas) at the email address ythomas7@liberty.edu. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Yvette Thomas. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at ythomas7@gmail.com. You may also contact the research’s faculty advisor, Dr. David Benders, at dsbenders@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(Note: Do not agree to participate unless IRB approval information with current dates has been added to this document.)
☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ____________

Signature of Investigator: ___________________________ Date: ____________