

## ABSTRACT

MYERS, TALBERT. The Persistence of African American Males in Community Colleges. (Under the direction of Drs. Leila González Sullivan and Tuere Bowles.)

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of African American male students in community college and to explore their decision-making process to persist. The study sought to describe these experiences and to discover any impact these experiences might have on decisions regarding completing a degree. The research questions guiding the study were: 1) what are the experiences of African American male students in community college? 2) how do personal, social and environmental factors affect the persistence of African American male students in community college? 3) what enhances the semester to semester persistence of African American male students in community college? and 4) what detracts from the semester to semester persistence of African American male students in community college?

This was a narrative inquiry qualitative study guided by a Critical Race Theory framework. Fourteen African American male students who ranged in age from 20 to 66 participated in the study. Data were collected primarily utilizing an in-depth semi-structured interview. Other data were gathered via document review and observation. Narratives were developed from the interviews and analyzed along with other data. Findings from analysis revealed that participants found their interactions with faculty, staff and other students affirmed and supported their academic endeavors. Classroom experiences, with a few exceptions, fostered academic success, and personal, social and environmental factors enhanced their determination to succeed academically. Finally, findings revealed that participants were able to overcome various potential detractors to their persistence.

Three conclusions were drawn from the findings regarding the experiences of the participants. The conclusions were: a) family and organizational/structural support are particularly important to the academic success of African American male students in community college; b) there was no evidence of endemic racism, but there were isolated incidents of racial microaggressions; and c) African American male community college students use negative societal stereotyping as a motivation for success.

There were five recommendations for further research developed from the findings. The four recommendations were: a) focus on African American male community college students who did not persist in their program of study; b) extend similar research to other geographical locations; c) explore the effectiveness of African American male success initiatives in community colleges; d) utilizing Critical Race Theory, focus on alternative ways in which challenging the dominant ideology might be accomplished; and e) explore the importance of familial influence on the academic success and persistence of African American male students and community college students generally.

The Persistence of African American Males in Community College

by  
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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation and resulting doctoral degree are dedicated first to my Lord and savior, Jesus Christ, for giving me the strength to complete this process. Secondly, to my lovely wife, Gail, who constantly encouraged me, who has always loved and believed in me, and whose patience is second to none. To my children, Kinetta, Maurice and Kenton, whose love was constant and who were very understanding while “Daddy” pursued this goal. And finally to my deceased mother, who said to me when I was a small boy, “Be a doctor.” Well, Mama, I am.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

I was born and reared in Mt. Gilead, a small town in rural Montgomery County, North Carolina. I was also educated in the Montgomery County Public School System, which remained segregated until the 1965-66 school year. I was one of thirty plus African American students who integrated West Montgomery High School. I will never forget that experience.

After graduating high school I attended North Carolina Central University (NCCU) in Durham, North Carolina and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in 1972 and a Master of Science degree in 1974. During my last year in graduate school I married my lovely wife, Gail. I entered the field of higher education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as a research technician in 1974, and have been involved in higher education since that time. I was employed as a faculty member at a private two-year college in Durham. Prior to moving back to my home county to take a position at the local community college, I was employed at North Carolina State University as a research technician for three years.

In 1981 I began my career with the North Carolina Community College System at Montgomery Community College (MCC) in Montgomery County. My family and I relocated to Johnston County after I became Dean of Continuing Education at Johnston Community College (JCC) in 1999. From MCC to JCC I remained with the North Carolina Community System until my retirement in 2011 from the position of Vice President of Community Development and Lifelong Learning at JCC. With the exception of the first

three years of my community college career, I have been involved in the non-credit continuing education aspect of both community colleges where employed.

I became interested in African American male persistence when I noticed there were very few African American male students at both community colleges where I was employed. Additionally, I discovered that the majority of African American male students in these community colleges were in continuing education programs for persons who had not completed high school or who were unemployed. This dissertation is not the culmination of this long time interest, but rather the beginning of what I hope will be years of study of the phenomenon resulting in the discovery of solutions to the problem of low graduation rates of African American males from community college degree programs and ultimately university graduate schools.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Leila González Sullivan for her dedication, guidance, and encouragement throughout this entire dissertation process. I also thank Dr. Tuere Bowles for her guidance and encouragement during this process, especially during the development and writing of Chapters Three and Four. Thank you is also extended to Dr. Alyssa Bryant Rockenbach and Dr. José Picart for their support and review of the research manuscript. A very special thank you goes to the participants of this study, who gave of their time and shared their stories to make this study possible. Also thanks to the administration of the three institutions which gave me permission to engage your students in dialogue to learn about their experiences on your campuses. A special thanks goes to Dr. Donald Reichard for always encouraging me to “Get it done, Talbert!” To my Continuing Education staff at Johnston Community College, “Thanks, for your support.” Special thanks goes to Pamela Earp for always asking, “How’s it going?” and for lending a helping hand whenever she could. Finally, thanks go to my brother, Elliott, and sisters, Diane and Naomi, and my extended family for their support and encouragement. To God be the glory!

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Student persistence and student retention are phrases that are constantly in the thoughts of higher education researchers (Braxton, Hirschy & McClendon, 2004; Thomas, 2002). One specific concern is the lack of persistence of racial and ethnic minority students (Fry, 2002; Glenn, 2003; Hu & St. John, 2001; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000).

In the past three decades research was focused primarily on access to higher education for racial and ethnic minorities (Karen, 1991; St. John & Noell, 1989; Thomas, Alexander & Eckland, 1979). The research emphasis during those decades was to identify and eliminate barriers to higher education for members of racial and ethnic minority groups. In fall 2005 approximately 14.9 million undergraduates were enrolled in higher education institutions across the U.S. (U.S. Dept of Ed., 2010). Minority students comprised 32 percent of the total undergraduate enrollment. Minority enrollment increased slightly each year through fall 2009 to reach approximately 35.7 percent (4.8 million) of the 17.5 million students enrolled that year as undergraduates in higher education (U. S. Dept of Ed). Approximately 41 percent or 7.1 million of these students were enrolled in community colleges in fall 2009 (U.S. Dept of Ed.). These numbers might indicate that access is not quite the problem it had been in previous times.

## **Background/Context**

Racial and ethnic minority students comprise a significant percentage of the total enrollment in higher education, and their persistence to degree attainment has remained close to enrollment percentages. In the 2005-06 academic year racial and ethnic minority students received 32 percent and 27.6 percent of associate's and bachelor's degrees respectively. In subsequent years through 2008-09, the percentages increased to 34 percent for associate's degrees and 28.5 percent for bachelor's degrees (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2010). Racial and ethnic minority students received 28.9 percent of all undergraduate degrees awarded in 2005-06. In the 2008-09 academic year, of the 2,388,693 undergraduate degrees awarded, racial and ethnic minority students received only 721,096, or 30.2 percent while representing 35.7 percent of the enrollment (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2010). Although degree completion rates are slightly lower than enrollment, the two have remained fairly close thus far during the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

African American degree attainment rates also remained slightly less than enrollment rates from 2005 through 2009. The U.S. Department of Education (2010) reported that enrollment of African Americans in fall 2005 was 13.1 percent of total undergraduate enrollment. During that same academic year, African Americans received 10.6 percent of all undergraduate degrees awarded. In fall 2009 African American students were 14.7 percent of the total undergraduate enrollment, and they received 10.8 percent of all undergraduate degrees awarded in 2008-09. There was a slight increase in the gap between enrollment rates

and degree attainment rates during that four-year period, with degree attainment rates falling behind by 1.4 percent.

Longitudinal cohort data on persistence to degree attainment for students entering a 2-year public institution in 2003-04 were kept and recorded for a three-year period and for a six-year period. Data indicate that persistence to degree for African Americans over the six-year period was lower than any other racial/ethnic group at 10.3 percent for associate's degree and 6.2 percent for bachelor's degree (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2009.) The same was true for the three-year persistence data indicating African Americans had the lowest persistence to degree at 11.1 percent for any degree and 5.8 percent for the associate's degree. The data also indicated that African Americans had the highest attrition rate over the three-year period of any racial/ethnic group at 52.6 percent having not attained a degree nor enrolled in 2009. For the six year-period African Americans had the second highest attrition rate at 49 percent having attained a degree nor enrolled behind Hispanics (U.S. Dept. of Ed.).

Difficulty with social and academic integration (Tinto, 1993) and financial difficulties (Braxton, Hirschy & McClendon, 2004; Parker, 1997) have been cited to explain low persistence to graduation rates of racial and ethnic minority students. Lower degree attainment rates for African American students have also been explained in ways other than those related to finances or social and academic integration. Some researchers (Eimers & Pike, 1997; Feagin, 1992; Fitzgerald & Bylsma, 2003; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000) posit that differential treatment as a result of racial discrimination negatively impacts African American student persistence to graduation. There is empirical evidence that racially

discriminatory environments on college campuses cause African American students to leave. Suen (1983) found that alienation relates to African American student attrition. Cabrera and Nora (1994) demonstrated that feelings of alienation among African American students stemmed primarily from prejudice and discrimination.

There is also a more specific concern for the persistence of African American males in higher education (Cuyjet, 1997; Davis, 1994; Gonsalves, 2002; Hall & Rowan, 2001; LaVant, Anderson & Tiggs, 1997; Person & LeNoir, 1997). According to some scholars, African American males in higher education have some of the lowest persistence rates of any group (Davis, 1994; Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2001; Hall & Rowan, 2001). Hagedorn, Maxwell and Hampton refer to statistics cited in Chenoweth (1998), who indicated that African American males in community colleges persisted at a rate lower than 10 percent. African American male undergraduate students also had one of the lowest degree attainment rates of any group during the first five years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. African American male students comprised 4.7 percent of the total undergraduate enrollment in 2005, but only received 3.3 percent of the undergraduate degrees awarded in 2005-06 (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2009, 2010). The gap between enrollment and degree attainment increased during the next several years. By 2009 African American male undergraduate enrollment increased to 5.3 percent of the total undergraduate student population; however, they only received 3.5 percent of all undergraduate degrees awarded in 2008-09 according to the U.S. Department of Education. While there was only one percentage point gain in enrollment, African American male degree attainment remained virtually the same. African American male

undergraduates rank next to the lowest, just ahead of Hispanic males, relative to the enrollment to degree attainment ratio.

The data for the 2003-04 cohort show that African American males were competitive for persistence to associate's degree rates at the three year and six year follow-ups with persistence rates of 6.6 percent and 8.8 percent respectively. However, African American males did not have competitive persistence rates with most other male students for the bachelor's degree with 0.2 percent and 17.1 percent respectively. They were next to last in both follow-up reports for persistence to bachelor's degree for male students and for students overall (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2009).

As a viable component of the nation's higher educational system, community colleges enroll a significant number of racial and ethnic minority students. It has already been mentioned that approximately 41 percent of all students in higher education in fall 2009 were enrolled in community colleges. Racial and ethnic minority students were 41 percent of the fall 2005 community college enrollment (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2010). Although enrollment figures for ethnic and racial minority students in community colleges are significant, there is an apparent issue with persistence. Only 33.6 percent of the 787,325 associate degrees awarded in 2008-09 were earned by racial and ethnic minority students. Persistence among this group, therefore, has become a major concern for administrators in community colleges.

African American males earned only 3.9 percent of all associate's degrees in 2005-06 (U.S. Dept of Ed., 2009). This percentage is among the lowest of that academic year. Only nonresident aliens, Native Americans, and Asian/Pacific Islanders earned fewer associate

degrees; however, these groups had significantly lower enrollments than African Americans. The early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were no better for African American male students in community colleges. They earned only 3.9 percent of all associate's degrees awarded between 2000 and 2004. Additionally, among male students in community colleges, African American males earned only 9.9 percent of associate's degrees during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; an alarming low rate when compared to other racial and ethnic minority males in community colleges.

### **Student Persistence Theories**

Student persistence in higher education has been researched extensively (Bean, 1980; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Braxton, Sullivan & Johnson, 1997; Braxton, Hirschy & McClendon, 2004; Pascarella, Terenzini & Nora, 1999) and has been based primarily upon a theoretical model established by Vincent Tinto. Tinto's (1975) theory posited that academic and social integration fosters academic success, which in turn leads to the decision to persist. Tinto later expanded upon his theoretical model and, according to his work in 1987 and 1993, the integration of the student requires positive interaction with fellow students and faculty. He also acknowledged the importance of environmental factors in persistence decisions.

Since then, other researchers have expanded upon Tinto's theory, including Bean (1980; 1990) and Pascarella, Terenzini and Nora (1999). These works generally supported Tinto's model. Bean (1980), however, based his model on turnover in the workplace. He studied attrition and found that integration issues were significant in students' decisions to leave college. Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) provided only moderate support for



Tinto's model. Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) built on the Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson study espousing a revision of Tinto's theory. They posited a model applicable to commuter colleges and universities which included student entry characteristics, the external environment, the campus environment, and the institutional academic communities as its four basic elements. I will discuss these elements in Chapter 2. Berger and Braxton (1998) found that organizational attributes were influential in the social integration of students.

The aforementioned works have their epistemological base grounded in Tinto's model; however, there are others who believe Tinto's foundation may have been flawed. Tierney (1992) suggested that Tinto's (1975) epistemological foundation may be flawed relative to social integration. Specifically, Tierney posited that there is a misrepresentation of the cultural definition of ritual and an overreliance on the integration framework. He suggested that the rites of passage rituals were not applicable across cultures but only within cultures and that Tinto took an anthropological term and disregarded its cultural foundations. Tierney also indicated that Tinto's model was individualistic and failed to acknowledge differences in class, race and gender.

Yet another problem with the Tinto model is its lack of application to community college students. Cohen and Brawer (1996) stated that the model could not apply to community college student persistence since it failed to include the age and differing educational goals of community college students. Wild and Ebber (2002) and Vorhees and Zhou (2000) concurred with Cohen and Brawer. The differences between four-year college and community college students could have an impact upon the application of academic and

social integration in community college student persistence. Braxton, Sullivan and Johnson (1997) found that only one of Tinto's propositions upon which his theory was founded had any strong empirical support relative to student persistence in two-year colleges.

Various theories have been offered as possible explanations for the lower rates of persistence to degree attainment among racial and ethnic minority students. Researchers such as Nora (1990), Tinto (1993), Parker (1997), and Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon (2004) have posited theories in an attempt to provide reasons for racial and ethnic students' lower persistence rates, including difficulty with social and academic integration (Tinto), financial difficulties (Parker), sensitivity to college costs (Braxton, Hirschy & McClendon), and impact of financial resources (Nora). Regardless of explanations or theories posited, we know that racial and ethnic minority undergraduate students do not persist to graduation at rates equal to their White counterparts.

My examination of the literature on persistence at the beginning of this study revealed mixed findings relative to two-year colleges. Some researchers found both academic and social integration significant for persistence (Napoli & Wortman, 1998; Braxton, Sullivan & Johnson, 1997). Others found that neither academic nor social integration had significant impact on persistence (Nora, 1987). Still another study (Nora, Attinasi & Matonak, 1990) found that only academic integration had significant impact on persistence.

### **Impact of Societal Factors**

There has also been a significant amount of research (Flowers, 2004-05; Hu & St. John, 2001; Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005; Opp, 2002; Pope, 2002; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora,

2000; Stromei, 2000; Szelenyi, 2001) done in the area of racial and ethnic minority student persistence, with much of this work focused on the community college. Little work, however, has been done specifically on the African American male student. It is imperative that researchers and administrators understand the reasons for the situation that the African American male student finds himself in higher education and particularly in community colleges. There are very few works (Singer, 2005) that address persistence of African American male students. Hagedorn, Maxwell and Hampton (2001) indicated that issues faced by the African American male student are personal; however, they failed to address the role that society plays in creating situations that give rise to issues faced by these young men.

Davis (2003) posited that African American males are put at risk very early in their educational careers. He stated that they are treated differently in school as early as kindergarten, and that throughout primary and middle school they get low ratings from teachers for social behavior and academic expectations. Duncan (2002) suggested that the differential treatment continues in secondary education settings. In an ethnographic study Duncan demonstrated racially based differential treatment of African American male students that resulted in marginalization of these students. He further indicated that the negative sentiments and statements create a hostile environment that impacts academic achievement of African American male students. Spradlin, Welsh and Hinson (2000) also addressed the response of African American students--particularly male students--to racism in education, finding that African American males felt that academic achievement was futile and that those who achieved academically were acting white.

Jenkins (2006) addressed the problem of educating the African American male in a racist society. He cited a 2004 study at Arizona State University which revealed that African American males have high levels of underachievement in higher education. Jenkins posited that the problem is largely due to a sense of defeatism ultimately brought on by society that perpetuates inferior early education and discriminatory practices. He speculated that these discriminatory practices infiltrate the higher educational system as well and negatively impact African American male student persistence. Research (Feagin, 1992; Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002; Rankin & Reason, 2005) has demonstrated that racism does exist in higher education institutions, and that this racism does have a negative effect upon persistence of African American students. The research, however, has focused primarily on four-year institutions with a few studies in community colleges and even fewer focusing on the African American male student.

Research on African American male student persistence in community colleges has primarily focused on personal attributes or characteristics of the students themselves. Studies by Hagedorn, Maxwell and Hampton (2001), Glenn (2003), and Mason (1998) have demonstrated the effects of student characteristics, external factors, and campus environment on African American male student persistence in community colleges. None of these studies specifically addresses the possible effects of a racially negative campus environment and the impact of such an environment on persistence of African American male community college students. The combination of mixed reviews of the impact of academic and social

integration and the implied impact of racism on minority persistence makes it necessary to examine persistence from a different perspective.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem that this research study addressed is the extremely low retention rates and persistence of African American male students in community colleges. The focus of this study was on how the experiences of the African American male community college student influence persistence. The literature, though limited, documents well the low graduation rates of African American male students in higher education generally and in community colleges specifically. When examining statistical data for African American male students in two-year institutions, these students have the lowest degree attainment rate when comparing the enrollment to degree attainment ratio.

Prior research on African American male students in community colleges focuses on the traditional factors influencing persistence. Student characteristics, general campus environment, special retention efforts, and external factors are the usual variables examined by researchers. This research study sought to explore in greater depth the experiences of African American male students in community colleges and to hear their own stories.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of African American male students in community colleges and to explore their decision to persist. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of African American male students in community college?
2. How do personal, social and environmental factors affect the persistence of African American male students in community college?
3. What enhances the semester to semester persistence of African American male students in community college?
4. What detracts from the semester to semester persistence of African American male students in community college?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that guided this study is Critical Race Theory (CRT). Critical race theory originated via legal writings of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman in the 1970s (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Taylor, 1998). Other writings have approached CRT from both the legal and educational viewpoint. Regardless of the approach, there are five generally accepted tenets within CRT:

- a. Race and racism are endemic or central in U.S. society.
- b. There is a commitment to social justice.
- c. The dominant ideology must be challenged.
- d. Experiential knowledge is emphasized.
- e. Interdisciplinary approaches are essential.

Each tenet has an important function within CRT when it is utilized as a lens to examine societal phenomena. Critical Race Theory identifies what are considered flaws within

society and the educational system that sabotage the success of racial and ethnic minorities generally and academically. Delgado Bernal (2002) used CRT to demonstrate how racial minority students are made to feel that their histories, experiences, cultures and languages are devalued or often omitted in educational settings. Her study also demonstrated the importance of recognizing that racial minority students are holders and creators of knowledge that can inform pedagogical approaches in the educational process. Duncan (2002) also used CRT when examining the experiences of African American male students in high school. His methodology included storytelling as he demonstrated race and racism as central to the treatment of African American male students in City High School. Using individual and focus group interviews as well as observations, Duncan's ethnographic study discovered evidence of marginalization and exclusion of African American male students in this high school.

Specifically for this study, CRT provides a framework and method to critically examine the experiences of African American male students in community colleges. Critical race theory, in effect, becomes important in the process of understanding factors that impact the persistence of African American male students in community colleges. All of the tenets had a role in the study and served as the basic guides for the study.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study has theoretical and practical significance for the field of higher education. It extends the literature on the theories regarding factors or variables that influence

persistence of African American male students in community colleges. The findings from this study help fill the gap in the literature regarding the influences of the experiences of African American male students in the community college setting on their persistence decisions. The results of this study also prove significant for higher education administrators who wish to promote the persistence and academic success of all students. This study illuminates the social/political/racial factors that might impede the academic success of African American male students in community colleges specifically and higher education generally. It also demonstrates the ability of African American male students to overcome negative societal factors that might impede academic success.

### **Definition of Terms**

Academic Integration—

Academic integration has both structural and normative dimensions. The structural dimension involves meeting the explicit standards of the institution. The normative dimension involves the student's identification with the prescribed or standard structure of the academic system (Tinto, 1975).

Persistence—

For purposes of discussion, in this study persistence is defined as the individual's choice to remain enrolled from semester to semester while seeking an associate's degree or a specific skills certificate.



#### Retention—

Practices used by colleges and universities to reduce the attrition of students. For the purposes of discussion, in this study retention is defined as the continued enrollment from semester to semester of students in an institution based upon programs and practices of the institution.

#### Social Integration—

Student integration involves the degree of congruency between the student and the social system of the institution and is achieved via interactions with peer groups and faculty, staff and administration (Tinto, 1975).

### **Chapter Summary**

Persistence of all higher education students generally and racial and ethnic minority students specifically is a concern for administrators and researchers. Although enrollment numbers for minority students have increased over the past three decades, graduation rates have not kept pace with increased enrollment. African American students have had lowest persistence to degree rates over three-year and six-year periods of any racial/ethnic group enrolling in a two-year institution in 2003-04. African American males were next to last for persistence to bachelor's degree rates of all males and all students overall for the three-year and six-year periods for the 2003-04 cohort. Among these students, African American males have the lowest persistence and graduation rates of any group. Since community colleges tend to be the entry point into higher education for these males and all minorities, persistence to graduation is of great interest to these institutions. The purpose of this study, then, was to

understand the experiences of African American male students in community colleges and to discover factors that lead to decisions to persist.

The next chapter provides a review of related literature on persistence of students in higher education, including community colleges. The chapter also reviews various theories on student persistence, including a discussion of African American male student persistence. Finally, the chapter focuses on an explanation of the theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of African American male students in community colleges and to explore their decision to persist. This qualitative study also sought to describe these experiences and to discover any impact these experiences might have these students' decisions regarding completing a degree. This chapter focuses on a review of related literature on persistence in higher education in four-year and two-year institutions generally. It then addresses persistence in community colleges among ethnic and racial minority students and, more specifically, African American males. Next, the chapter relates organizational culture and structure to persistence and provides a discussion of Critical Race Theory as a framework for this research. The chapter ends with a brief summary and introduction to Chapter Three.

#### **College Persistence Theories**

Researchers have examined extensively the persistence of college students generally, as well as persistence of racial and ethnic minorities, with occasional focus on African American male college students. The conceptual framework upon which the majority of the research has been based is Tinto's interactional theory of departure. In 1975, Vincent Tinto posited his theoretical model of academic and social integration as factors that facilitate student retention. Tinto viewed the college setting as a societal system and theorized that students who did not successfully integrate into this setting eventually dropped out. The model that Tinto created was based upon work by Durkheim (1951) that dealt with suicide

and on Van Gannep's (1960) theory on rites of passage. According to Durkheim, suicide was more likely to occur if the individual failed to appropriately integrate into society. Tinto likened the student's decision to leave college to Durkheim's theory of the various forms of suicide. Durkheim posited four types of suicide: altruistic (selflessness; for the good of the whole), anomic (social erosion of standards and values), fatalistic (fate controlled), and egotistical (self centered). Tinto approached the suicide discussion from an institutional perspective. He felt institutional ideologies, disruptive forces, and social and intellectual character as causes of departure were similar to Durkheim's types of suicide. The student would in essence be committing educational suicide when leaving the institution. The type of student departure could subsequently be classified as altruistic, anomic, fatalistic or egotistical based upon the circumstances that led to the departure.

Utilizing Van Gannep's theories (1960), Tinto offered an additional explanation for his interactional theory. Tinto (1975) indicated that the student goes through steps similar to rites of passage as they integrate into the college community. The three steps of this passage are separation, transition and incorporation. The separation occurs as the student disassociates himself or herself from relationships, norms and membership in a past community. What follows is the transition step in which the student moves between the past community and the new college community. This transition involves some vacillation between the two communities until the student acquires the norms of the college community. It is when the student acquires the norms of the college community and becomes incorporated (integrated) that he or she completes the rites of passage process into college.

Tinto stated that this process is longitudinal and involves the interaction of numerous individual and institutional variables. Simply put, Tinto posited that students make decisions to stay or leave institutions of higher education based upon the interaction between the student, who possesses certain attributes, skills, resources, experiences and dispositions, and the institution's academic and social systems. If the overall interaction is positive and the student successfully integrates into the social and academic systems of the institution, it is likely the student will decide to persist. However, if the overall interaction is negative and the student fails to successfully integrate into the social and academic systems of the institution, it is likely the student will leave.

There are those who find errors in Tinto's theory. For example, Tierney (1992) indicated that Tinto's use of Van Gannep's theory is flawed. Specifically, Tierney posited that there is a misrepresentation of the cultural definition of ritual and an overreliance on the integration framework. He suggested that the rites of passage rituals are not applicable across cultures and that Tinto adopts an anthropological term and disregards its cultural foundations. Tierney also suggested that Tinto's model is individualistic and fails to acknowledge differences in class, race and gender.

According to Tinto (1987, 1993), the integration of the student involves interactions with fellow students and faculty. Tinto (1982, 1987) also incorporated theories from Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) and Bean (1980) and proposed that attrition was a longitudinal process that involved repeated interactions between the student and the institution. These interactions are both formal and informal and are important to forming

relationships and having a sense of belonging. These interactions are also coupled with student characteristics and together they impact the student's decision to leave or remain enrolled. Tinto (1993) later revisited issues from the 1987 work and addressed issues relative to four-year commuter and two-year institutions.

Other researchers (Bean, 1980, 1990; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1978, 1980; Pascarella, Terenzini & Nora, 1999) have tested and built upon Tinto's work to further expand the literature on student persistence. Terenzini and Pascarella demonstrated support for Tinto's theory, finding that academic integration may be more important than social integration. They also found that student-faculty relationships were key factors in predicting student attrition. They noted that the greater the frequency of informal interaction between students and faculty the greater likelihood of persistence.

Bean's 1980 study offered a variation of Tinto's theoretical model on student retention. Bean proposed that student attrition is similar to workplace attrition. However, a specific limitation of this study was the selection of the sample group. Bean created a homogeneous sample group that eliminated racial minorities, adult learners, married persons and part-time students. The concern is that the homogeneous group does not reflect the heterogeneity of the workplace or the college environment, and therefore limits any generalizations of the findings. Additionally, the conclusions would be suspect if applied to other racial groups, persons of a different age group or part-time students.

Bean and Metzner (1985) posited the Student Attrition Model. This theoretical model was developed based upon nontraditional students and identifies four sets of variables.

Summers (2003) summarizes the variables as “(a) academic performance as measured by grade point average; (b) intent to leave, which is influenced primarily by psychological outcomes and academic variables; (c) background and defining variables, primarily high school performance and educational goals; and (d) environmental variables, which are expected to have substantial direct effect on dropout decisions” (p. 3). Bean and Metzner (1985) defined nontraditional students utilizing several variables including age, part-time student status, and commuter status. According to these researchers, nontraditional students can be of any race or ethnicity, and either male or female. Because their nontraditional status is based in the commuter nature of their colleges, social integration is not considered as important as it would be for students living on campus. The variables that constitute this theoretical model are nontraditional student background variables, academic performance variables, and environmental variables. A brief description of how these variables influence decisions to persist or leave follows in the next few paragraphs.

The nontraditional student background variables include academic and other characteristics. Bean’s and Metzner’s (1985) theoretical model incorporated some demographic characteristics, including age, enrollment status, residence, educational goals, high school performance, ethnicity, and gender. Academic variables include study habits, academic advising, certainty about major, absenteeism, and course availability. Environmental variables are finances, work schedule, outside encouragement, family responsibilities, and opportunities to transfer. Other elements of the model include an academic outcome, which is the resulting grade point average (GPA), and psychological

outcomes, including satisfaction, goal commitment, stress, and utility. Horn and Carroll (1996) described non traditional student background characteristics as delayed enrollment in postsecondary education, part time attendance, working full time, being financially independent, having dependents other than spouse, single parenthood and not having a standard high school diploma. They also noted that any student possessing one or more of these characteristics can be classified as nontraditional.

All of these variables and elements interact to bring the nontraditional student to a decision to persist or leave the college. It is posited that a nontraditional student background includes characteristics that may prove detrimental to academic success. According to Bean and Metzner (1985), environmental variables are more significant for nontraditional students, thereby countering background variables. When academic and environmental variables are positive the student could be expected to persist. However, when environmental variables are negative and academic variables are positive, the student will likely leave. Conversely, when academic variables are negative but environmental variables are positive, the student will likely persist. The theoretical model posited that the interaction depicts a pathway to the decision on departure or persistence. The pathway is influenced by the interaction of academic and environmental variables.

Bean (1990) built upon his own model, as well as Tinto's (1975 & 1987) and attempted to incorporate factors that affect decisions to persist. The model is longitudinal, indicating that the decision to stay or leave college happens over time. The model depicts the relationship of the factors to the decision to stay or leave college. Bean based his model



upon the theoretical and empirical work of Spady (1970), Tinto (1975, 1987), Bean (1980, 1983) and Bean and Metzner (1985). Bean's model indicates that the decision to persist is a complex, longitudinal process that begins with background characteristics of students. According to Bean, the students then interact with the institution organizationally, academically and socially. The external environment also impacts the students simultaneously as they form attitudes about the institution and make decisions to persist or leave. Based upon his model, Bean also offered intervention activities that were designed to enhance persistence.

In 1993 Tinto decided to revisit his 1987 work and examine commuter four-year and two-year colleges. With reference to the work of other researchers (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Pascarella, Duby & Iverson, 1983; Pascarella, Duby, Miller & Rasher, 1981; Pascarella & Wolfe, 1985; Schwartz, 1990; Staats & Partio, 1990; Stage, 1989; Webb, 1990; Williamson & Creamer, 1988; Zaccaria and Creaser, 1971), Tinto indicated that departure of students in commuting colleges seem to be influenced less by social factors within the institution and more by academic matters. The institutions, therefore need not invest large amounts of resources for establishing activities to promote social integration. Tinto instead advocated that commuter-serving colleges create learning or classroom communities to foster academic integration of students. These learning communities could provide opportunities for students to develop relationships that foster integration into the institution.

Tinto (1993) also posited that there are external factors or variables that have a significant influence on student persistence. These external factors include family

responsibilities, work, community responsibilities and influences resulting from actions of state and local organizations. All of these can have an impact on decisions to persist or leave college. Several authors (Chacon, Cohen, & Strover, 1983; Weidman, 1985; Schwartz, 1990) have indicated that external factors may have more of an influence on shaping students' lives and decisions than institutional factors. Tinto, however, concluded that the institution's ability to retain students lies in the ability to establish a healthy, caring environment. The environment should provide opportunities in which all students can find a niche in one or more academic and/or social communities with the understanding that social communities are few.

Braxton, Sullivan and Johnson (1997) provided only moderate support for Tinto's model, indicating that five of the thirteen propositions of the model had strong empirical backing upon aggregate appraisal. These five propositions are:

- Student entry characteristics affect the level of initial commitment to the institution.
- The greater the degree of social integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution.
- The initial level of institutional commitment affects the subsequent level of institutional commitment.
- The initial level of commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the subsequent level of commitment to the goal of college graduation.

- The greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution, the greater the likelihood of student persistence in college.

The other eight propositions demonstrated low to moderate empirical backing for Tinto's model (Braxton, Sullivan & Johnson, 1997). There were also varying degrees of empirical support for Tinto's propositions depending upon institutional type. They found that only one of Tinto's propositions (student entry characteristics directly affect persistence) received strong empirical support for student persistence in two-year colleges. Braxton, Sullivan and Johnson also found that just two propositions (student entry characteristics directly affect persistence, and initial level of institutional commitment affects subsequent commitment) demonstrated strong empirical support in commuter universities. Four of the five propositions for which there was strong empirical support regarding persistence in residential institutions were the same as those for the aggregate appraisal, with one exception. Proposition one, student entry characteristics, was replaced by proposition five, initial commitment to graduation (Braxton, Sullivan & Johnson). Thus there is a difference in the factors that impact persistence by institutional type. There are differences in student characteristics by institutional type as well.

Based upon the findings in Braxton, Sullivan and Johnson (1997), a revision of Tinto's theory was proposed by Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon (2004). These researchers offered a theory on student departure in commuter colleges and universities. The theory includes student entry characteristics, the external environment, the campus environment,

and the institutional academic communities as its four basic elements. Student entry characteristics are those that the student brings when he or she enrolls in the institution. These include family background, academic ability, and high school academic achievement. These characteristics affect the initial level of commitment the student has for the institution.

The external environment as an element of the theory acknowledges that commuter students have obligations and responsibilities outside of the college environment. Often these students work fulltime, have families and other community involvement. These external forces play a major role in defining the student's life; consequently, these factors are also very important in the decision to persist.

The third element, campus environment, is another important factor for persistence. Commuter campuses are usually characterized by hurry. The hurrying is that of students going to and from classes and between the parking lot and campus buildings. There is little time for having meaningful conversations and establishing relationships outside of the academic setting. Therefore, the campus environment differs from the usual residential institution in not having numerous campus activities that are designed to foster social interaction of students.

The campus environment is basically determined by the institutional characteristics which manifest themselves through the actions of administrators, faculty and staff. There are two very important organizational characteristics that indirectly affect persistence. They are commitment to the welfare of students and institutional integrity (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). When students perceive that college employees have their best interests

as priorities, they become more committed to the institution and more likely to persist. Likewise, institutional integrity promotes student institutional commitment and ultimately persistence. It is important for students to perceive that administration, faculty and staff are true to the institutional mission and goals.

The fourth and final element, academic communities, is vital because of the absence of well defined social structures in the commuter colleges. These academic communities promote the academic integration of commuter students and, to a lesser degree, social integration. Academic communities provide opportunities for student interaction via cooperative learning, role playing, discussion and group work. Fostering academic integration of students enhances their institutional commitment and thereby influences positive decisions on persistence. This model was termed the Theory of Student Departure in Commuter Colleges and Universities (Braxton et al., 2004). Given the results and conclusions of Braxton, Sullivan and Johnson (1997) and the development of the commuter college model, Tinto's model of student persistence bears little to no correlation with student persistence in two-year colleges.

The majority of persistence studies conducted over the past several decades have been based upon the Interactionalist Theory of Tinto (1975). Tinto based his initial theory upon work by Durkheim (1961) and Van Gannep (1960). The theory suggested that student persistence is influenced by the successful integration of the student into the academic and social fabric of the institution. There have been empirical studies testing the validity of Tinto's theory which led to the development of subsequent theories such as the Student

Attrition Model by Bean and Metzner (1985) as well as others. Tinto expanded upon his original theory and posited a theory on persistence of students in commuter colleges and universities in 1993 stating that academic integration was more important than social integration in these types of institutions. Further studies led to the development of the Theory of Student Departure in Commuter Colleges and Universities by Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon (2004). This theory included student characteristics, the external environment, the campus environment, and the institutional academic communities as the four elements that contribute to persistence or departure. Ultimately, the various theories indicated that no single theory was applicable to student persistence and that variables impacting student persistence differed according to student characteristics, and institutional type. A discussion of empirical studies of persistence in community colleges appears later, but first it is necessary to review similar studies on student persistence in general.

### **Student Persistence/Retention in Higher Education**

Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) Interactionalist Theory has evolved and been merged with other theories (Bean, 1980; Cabrera, Nora & Castañeda, 1993), yet the common theme throughout the majority of studies has been student integration. An empirical study by Berger and Milem (1999) drew upon Tinto, Bean, Milem and Berger (1997), and Paulsen and St. John (1997) to examine student persistence. Berger and Milem proposed a model combining student involvement and student perceptions as factors influencing persistence. More specifically, they examined the relationship of student involvement and student

perception of integration to student persistence. They chose a highly selective private residential university in the Southeast U.S. for the study.

The study was longitudinal, with data collections from first time freshmen entering in Fall of 1995. Data were collected in August and October of 1995 and March of 1996. There were seven sets of independent variables used to test the model. The variables were: (1) student background characteristics, (2) initial commitment, (3) mid-fall behavioral/involvement measures, (4) mid-fall perceptual measures, (5) mid-spring behavioral/involvement measures, (6) academic and social integration, and (7) subsequent commitment. These variables are listed, according to Berger and Milem (1999), in their hypothesized order of influence. The dependent variable was the measure of persistence from the first to the second year at the university.

Berger and Milem (1999) found that students who do not become involved early in the fall are less likely to persist. They also found that early peer involvement seems to strengthen perceptions of the institutional and social support, ultimately leading to persistence. Involvement can be with faculty and staff or primarily with peers. Early involvement with faculty tends to increase the likelihood that students will have favorable perception of the institutional support, which could lead to increased institutional commitment. However, the study revealed a disturbing contradiction regarding African American students and institutional commitment. Although African American students entered the institution with strong levels of commitment, they were less likely to perceive the institution as supportive and less likely to have strong levels of subsequent institutional

commitment. They were, therefore, less likely to persist. Being African American was the third highest negative predictor of persistence following the two involvement measures.

Berger and Milem indicate that an explanation for this pattern might be found in the examination of the racial climate of the institution. As a highly selective private institution in the Southeast U.S., this university had a nearly homogeneous white student population. This fact was noted as one of the limitations of the study.

Another study focusing on student involvement was conducted by Braxton, Milem and Sullivan (2000). They examined the influence of active learning on the student departure process. The theoretical framework was grounded in the concept that classroom activities influence student departure decisions. Specifically, they proposed that active learning may directly influence social integration. This proposition is based upon work by Milem and Berger (1997) proposing that positive, rewarding experiences in the classroom foster the psychological energy for students to seek to establish relationships in the social communities of their respective institutions. Put another way, active involvement in the learning process facilitates social involvement of students. These rewarding experiences are created via active learning such as classroom discussions, cooperative learning, debates, role playing, questions on course examinations, and selective questions faculty ask students in class (Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2000). These activities engage the student and foster deeper involvement. Active learning may also facilitate networking for peer support and the development of friendships that help students integrate into the social community of the institution. Further, by



influencing social integration, active learning may affect subsequent institutional commitment, thereby impacting student departure decisions.

The study was a longitudinal design conducted with first-time full-time freshmen at a highly selective, private Research I university. Three surveys were administered to students on three separate occasions, one during orientation, the second during fall semester, and the third during spring semester. Analysis of survey results demonstrated that some active learning practices exert positive influence on social integration, subsequent institutional commitment and, ultimately, student departure decisions. Additionally, the analysis demonstrated that some active learning practices have direct influence while others have indirect influence, and still others have both. Finally, the Braxton, Milem and Sullivan (2000) study demonstrated that student involvement via active learning has a positive influence on persistence.

This research supports Berger and Milem's (1999) findings on student involvement and its positive effects on persistence. Active learning practices in the classroom facilitate student involvement and possibly positive student perceptions of the institution, which, in turn, could have a positive effect on persistence of African American students.

Akin to student involvement is "sense of belonging" as noted by Hoffman, Richmond, Marrow, and Salomone (2003). Sense of belonging as defined by Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsman, and Collier (1992) is "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment" (p. 173). Utilizing the Hagerty et al. definition of sense of

belonging, Hoffman et al. investigated the influence of sense of belonging relative to persistence and what factors created a sense of belonging in students. They specifically studied the influence of learning communities on student sense of belonging. Learning communities are defined as “co-registration or block scheduling that enables students to take courses together” (Tinto, 1998, p. 170). The study was conducted at the University of Rhode Island, was based primarily upon Tinto’s (1975, 1987, & 1998) Interactionalist Theory and utilized both qualitative and quantitative methodology.

The qualitative portion of the study examined peer relationships, experiences with faculty, participation in campus activities, challenges and changes, stressors, satisfaction with the university, and intentions to persist. Results indicated that students involved in learning communities developed better peer relationships around academic matters, increased perception of support and comfort in and out of the classroom, and established academic support systems (Hoffman et al., 2003). The quantitative portion examined student/peer relationships and student/faculty relationships. Results indicated that students participating in learning communities perceived positive peer and faculty support, as well as greater classroom comfort and reduced perceptions of isolation. Both qualitatively and quantitatively Hoffman et al. demonstrated that sense of belonging within the institution appears to be derived from the perception of valued involvement in the college environment. The valued involvement stems from establishing functionally supportive peer relationships and perceptions that faculty are compassionate and know their students. Learning communities

facilitate valued involvement and foster academic and social integration built around relationships that ease challenges and stressors.

There are still other studies that investigated persistence and how best to retain students. One study that specifically investigated ways to enhance the first year experience of first time freshmen was conducted by Peat, Dalziel and Grant (2001). Specifically, they were investigating the validity of the use of peer networks through a one-day workshop to enhance student adjustment to university life. The study's underlying theories stemmed from Tinto (1975; 1987; 1996), Cohen and Hobbeman (1983), and McInnis and James (1995). The study was conducted at the University of Sidney, Australia, where the Faculty of Science implemented a transition workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce students to the importance and benefits of peer networks and to facilitate the establishment of such networks (Peat, Dalziel, & Grant). Peer groups were created during the workshop and students were encouraged to get to know the others in their groups and to continue meeting during the semester, particularly outside of class time. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

The quantitative method involved administering surveys to three groups of students. Group One was Faculty of Science students attending the workshop. Group Two was Faculty of Science students not attending the workshop, and Group Three was students from other departments not offering the workshop. The results showed that Group One (workshop attendees) scored higher on a range of measures indicating better adjustment to university life (Peat, Dalziel, & Grant, 2001). In particular, Group One showed they were more likely to be

involved in collaborative learning, more likely to be academically motivated, more likely to have a well-developed sense of purpose and identity, more likely to adopt a deep approach to learning, more appreciative of their courses, and less likely to have considered leaving college. A second quantitative analysis examined academic performance and revealed that, when controlling for other variables, there was a significant and positive effect on semester grade averages for students attending the workshop.

The qualitative portion of the study involved students completing a survey consisting of three open-ended questions. Of the seventy four respondents, an overwhelming majority (69) was positive in revealing three major themes related to social network formation (Peat, Dalziel, & Grant, 2001). Those themes were the actual formation of social networks, social network helped ease transition, and social network helped overall adaptation to university environment. Additionally, students indicated that the workshop helped with their understanding of expectations.

The five previously discussed studies in some way examined student involvement that fosters a sense of belonging and integration of students into the college environment. The involvement encompasses interaction with faculty, staff and peers that facilitates the development of relationships that positively impact persistence. There are other studies that focused more on the academic elements of persistence.

Ryan and Glenn (2002) examined the comprehensive retention programs of a four-year metropolitan university in the Southwest U.S. The study chronicled a five-year effort to ascertain the effectiveness of several retention programs of the university. The project was

actually a series of studies on university retention programs. The underlying theories and assumptions were from Astin (1993), Kuh, et al. (1996) and Tinto (1987, 1993, 1998).

Utilizing a series of surveys and examination of student Grade Point Averages (GPA), they attempted to answer eight questions regarding these retention programs. The questions were:

1. What contributes to student decision satisfaction?(satisfaction with college choice)
2. What role does academic performance play in retention?
3. Can a probation-recovery program improve one-year retention rates?
4. How can candidates be identified for probation-recovery programs?
5. How retention-effective is a probation-recovery program?
6. Can we improve retention by improving academic competencies?
7. Will high-risk students benefit from intensive academic training?
8. Can freshman seminars increase retention for regularly admitted students? (pp. 301-314)

One year retention rates were analyzed relative to these eight questions through examination of three academic and two advisory programs designed to enhance one-year retention of freshman students. The academic programs were College Success Seminar (CSS), Supplemental Instructional (SI), and Learning-to-Learn (LTL). The advisory focused intervention programs were Phoenix and Check Point. All three academic strategies had positive results, but the most successful was LTL (Ryan & Glenn, 2002).

Results of the study indicated that emphasis on increased academic efficacy in retention programs produces a positive effect on one-year retention. The intrusive advising programs also increased persistence by 3 to 4 percent (Ryan & Glenn, 2002). Additionally, SI increased academic competencies and increased freshmen one-year retention by 15 percent, with LTL affecting a 14 percent increase. For this Southwestern university, intrusive advising programs that facilitate academic competencies have proven to be the best strategies for one-year retention of first-year first-time freshmen.

The studies on student persistence in higher education discussed in the previous paragraphs are representative of the type of research that has occurred over the past two decades. Primarily, empirical research shows that student involvement (Berger & Milem, 1999; Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2000; Hoffman et al., 2003; Peat, Dalziel & Grant, 2001; Ryan & Glenn, 2002) is important to student persistence in higher education. Student involvement may be accomplished in various ways, including peer group formation, intrusive advising and supplemental instruction, involvement with faculty, and active learning.

### **Community College Student Persistence/Retention**

The previously discussed studies focused primarily on four-year institutions. Theories have also emerged relative to persistence and student retention at commuter colleges and universities and community colleges. One model that was previously mentioned is the Theory of Student Departure in Commuter Colleges and Universities proposed by Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon (2004). They offered this theory as a revision of Tinto (1987, 1993) and as a follow-up to work by Braxton, Sullivan and Johnson (1997).

Although Tinto's theory primarily applied to four-institutions, he also began to examine departure in commuter and two-year colleges in his 1993 work. Cohen and Brawer (1996) offered reasons why application of Tinto's model to community college persistence was inappropriate. These reasons included the age of students and the differing educational goals of community college students. In contrast, Tinto's model dealt primarily with traditional age four-year university undergraduates. Community college students are generally older than university undergraduates and their goals may range from obtaining a degree to only wanting one specific course (Cohen & Brawer, 1996).

Reporting on work done by Bohnam and Luckie (1993), Zhai and Monzon (2001) concurred with Cohen and Brawer, noting that community college students are typically older than the traditional university undergraduate student. Wild and Ebbers (2002) and Voorhees and Zhou (2000) concurred with Cohen and Brawer as well, indicating that community college students typically have goals that vary and often don't involve earning a degree. The range of educational goals that community college students may have is evidenced in the results of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE, 2005). That year's analysis of survey data revealed that nationwide, 57 percent seek the associate's degree, 40 percent attend for self improvement, 41 percent attend to obtain or upgrade job related skills, and 30 percent seek to change careers. There is overlap in these statistics since many students have more than one goal for attendance at a community college. In an earlier study Voorhees (1987) researched community college persistence relative to earlier studies (Bean, 1980, 1983; Lening, Beal & Saur, 1980; Pascarella, Smart &

Ethington, 1986; Peng & Fetters, 1978; Tinto, 1975; Walleri, 1981; Voorhees, 1985) to determine the influence of demographic and conceptual variables from persistence models designed for four-year institutions. Voorhees found students' purpose for enrolling to have a significant association with persistence. This finding is similar to suggestions of Cohen and Brawer, as well as Tinto and others regarding community college students' varied educational goals. Gender and intent to return were also found to have significant associations with persistence for community college students (Voorhees, 1987).

Tinto (1993) does address some differences between two-year and four-year college students, indicating that two-year college students are more likely to be working while in college, attending part time, and living at home. Tinto also indicated that two-year college students have a wide range of external factors competing for their time and energy. These competing factors tend to reduce the amount of time these students spend on academic work. Additionally, these external competing factors, along with attending part time and living at home, are characteristics of nontraditional students, according to Horn and Carroll (1996).

Bean and Metzner (1980) described a model of the nontraditional student from which Tinto (1993) and Horn and Carroll (1996) derived their characteristics. The model was based upon three factors distinguishing nontraditional students from traditional students. The factors were: (1) nontraditional students commute rather than living in a college residence; (2) nontraditional students are usually older than traditional students; and, (3) nontraditional students have less intensity and duration of interaction with primary agents of socialization at the institution. Other nontraditional characteristics that are usually found in two-year college



or community college students are financial independence, delayed enrollment into postsecondary education, single parenthood, nonstandard high school diploma, and having a dependent other than spouse (Horn & Carroll, 1996; NCES, 1998). Additionally, Rendon (1994, 2000) included first-generation, low income and employment status as nontraditional characteristics. As indicated earlier, students are classified as nontraditional when possessing one or more of the aforementioned characteristics. Research has demonstrated that an overwhelming majority of two-year college or community college students are nontraditional (Horn & Carroll, 1996; Choy, 2002).

Nontraditional status has been linked to community college students' lack of persistence. According to Choy (2002), nontraditional characteristics with the greatest negative effect upon persistence are delayed enrollment, part time enrollment, financial independence, and nonstandard high school diploma. Horn (1996) categorized students as minimally nontraditional (one characteristic), moderately nontraditional (two or three characteristics) and highly nontraditional (four or more characteristics). Horn found that the higher the degree of nontraditional status, the greater the likelihood of student departure.

The nontraditional status of a vast majority of community college students and the differences in two-year and four-year institutions have led researchers to posit and investigate various theories on persistence in community colleges. Schmid and Abell (2003) examined three cohorts of students at an urban community college in the Southeast. The three cohorts were non-returning students, current students and graduates. In addition to examining the nontraditional background characteristics, the study also researched student involvement

relative to persistence. Each cohort was surveyed with specific questions that were identical on each survey. The non-returning students were mailed surveys. Current students were administered surveys in their classes and graduates were administered surveys during the graduation application process.

Schmid and Abell (2003) found that more than 50 percent of all three cohorts had delayed entry and were financially independent. They also found that all three cohorts were higher than the national average for community college students in being enrolled part-time and working full-time. When comparing the cohorts Schmid and Abell found that non-returning students were 20 percent more likely to be enrolled part-time than current students, and 31 percent more likely to be part-time than graduates. They also found that 46 percent of non-returning students worked full-time compared to 37 percent of graduates demonstrating a 19 percent difference. There was also a difference between the non-returning students and the current students, but the greater difference was between the non-returning students and the graduates.

When examining student involvement using a national data set, Schmid and Abell (2003) reported community college students were 31 percent less likely to participate in study groups than public four-year college students. Community college students were also 31 percent less likely to participate in school clubs than were public four-year college students according to Schmid and Abell. With 85 percent of four-year college students speaking with faculty outside of class and only 69 percent of community college students doing so it appears that community college students are less likely to engage with faculty

except in class. Further, the non-returning students had the lowest percentage of students speaking with faculty outside of class (41 percent). Schmid and Abell determined that community college students exhibiting certain nontraditional demographic characteristics were most often those who did not persist.

There are other studies examining community college student persistence without focusing specifically on the nontraditional status of many community college students. Halpin (1990) analyzed Tinto's model as revised by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) to determine its application to community college student persistence. Halpin administered a questionnaire to 291 first-time, full-time freshmen three weeks before the end of the first semester, looking at background and environmental variables; the dependent variables were student categories of persister, dismissed, and withdrawer. Additionally, Halpin performed a principal component factor analysis of factors influencing persistence that yielded five factors: (1) peer group relations, (2) informal relationships with faculty, (3) academic and intellectual development, (4) faculty concern for teaching and student development, and (5) institutional and goal commitment. Halpin determined that academic integration had greater influence on persistence than social integration. The factors making the greatest contribution to persistence were faculty concern for teaching and student development, academic and intellectual development, and interaction with faculty. According to Halpin, the academic aspect of Tinto's model does appear to predict persistence or lack thereof in the open door community college setting.

Bers and Smith (1991) sought to demonstrate the influence of student intent and academic and social integration on community college student persistence. In their study surveys were administered to 1142 students, and fall to spring enrollment was employed as the measure of persistence. A principal components factor analysis was performed relative to social and academic integration for a comparison to the same factors as in Pascarella and Terenzini (1980). Factors that emerged were Academic and Intellectual Development, Peer Group Interactions, Interactions with Faculty, Faculty Interest in Teaching Students, and Institutional/Goal Commitment. Intercorrelations among the factors were examined, and it was determined that the highest correlation existed between Academic and Intellectual Development and Interactions with Faculty.

Bers and Smith's analysis (1991) revealed that employment status contributed most to the differences between persisters and nonpersisters, and that the more hours worked, the less likely students would persist. Interestingly, they also found that those not working at all were less likely to persist than those working part time. Finally, Bers and Smith found that for community college students, student characteristics, academic intent, and employment status were more influential relative to persistence than academic or social integration.

Tinto (1997) examined community colleges as an expansion of his work in 1993. He specifically addressed how classroom activities in community colleges might impact student persistence. At that time, he was still of the notion that student integration was key to persistence and that involvement in the classroom through learning communities could foster not only academic improvement, but also persistence. According to Tinto the community

college classroom is the only place where involvement occurs. Although the classroom has been studied by various researchers, Tinto contended that the linkage between classroom experiences, student learning and persistence had not been thoroughly explored.

Tinto (1997) sought to answer two questions regarding shared learning. Tinto first wanted to know if a shared learning program influenced persistence and, secondly, if so, then how does it do so? To answer these questions Tinto examined a Coordinated Studies Program (CSP) in a community college. He employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer these questions. The quantitative results demonstrated greater involvement in academic and social activities for CSP students than students in the regular curriculum and this heightened involvement resulted in a more positive view the college climate generally. CSP students persisted at greater rates (66.7%) in the following fall term than did non-program participants (52%). Tinto also found that GPA, hours studied per week, perceptions of faculty, and the factor score on involvement with other students were significant predictors of persistence.

The qualitative aspect of the study involved interviews of students within CSP and document reviews of school publications, class materials, course syllabi and schedules. The results of this process generated three themes that linked students' classroom experiences and persistence: building supportive peer groups, shared learning-bridging the academic-social divide, and gaining a voice in the construction of knowledge (Tinto, 1997). Tinto concluded that these themes resulting from the collaborative style of learning in CSP were positive influences on student persistence.

Tinto described this model of smaller academic and social communities created within classrooms as the heart of the larger academic and social community of the college. Successfully participating in the smaller classroom community potentially enables the student to navigate the larger college community (Tinto, Goodsell & Russo, 1993).

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) gathers data from community college students to provide information on the engagement of students and its impact on their academic goals. The CCSSE also provides suggestions and recommendations for community colleges to have a greater positive impact on the engagement of community college students. Survey results over several years demonstrate that community colleges must engage students by design, making engagement intentional and inescapable (CCSSE, 2004, 2008, 2009). Because many community college students are highly nontraditional, this can prove to be challenging to community college faculty and staff. For example, the 2005 survey showed that African American males were more engaged than other students with faculty in activities other than coursework and in college sponsored activities. This means that community colleges must find ways to incorporate these out-of-class interests of African American men into the classroom.

Older students (25+ years of age) are more focused and engaged, more likely to attend class regularly and be prepared for class, and participate in classroom discussions (CCSSE, 2005). All students perform best when expectations are high and the necessary support is in place to help them achieve academically (CCSSE, 2008). This means that community colleges must have high expectations of students by ensuring coursework is

academically challenging and then provide academic support at times and places that are convenient to students. In order for these things to occur there must be the development of relationships among students, faculty and staff as well as the institution. In other words, connections between the institution and students must be established and nourished (CCSSE, 2009). These connections occur when the institutions communicate a belief that all students can be successful and demonstrate that the entire campus is committed to that belief. Some of the tools that can be employed to establish this connectedness include strategies to ensure early personal contact of students with other students, faculty and staff; facilitate student use of various technologies including social networking tools; promote faculty employment of interactive learning strategies; increase shared experiences for students through various campus activities and service projects away from campus.

Research has shown that the majority of community college students enroll for various reasons and that they have varied educational goals (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Tinto, 1993; Voorhees & Zhou, 2000; Zhai & Monzon, 2001). Additionally, community college students are considered nontraditional students. Nontraditional status indicates that these students are older than traditional aged college students; commute rather than live on campus; delay postsecondary education; possess a nontraditional high school diploma; are employed; and have dependents other than spouse. According to Horn & Carroll (1996) and Choy (2002), these characteristics contribute to a lack of persistence of community college students. These nontraditional characteristics somehow impede the integration of community college students into the institution (Schmid & Bell, 2003).

There are, however, factors that contribute to the persistence of community college students. Specifically, faculty concern for teaching and student development (Halpin, 1990) and learning communities (Tinto, 1997) were found to be positive influences on student persistence.

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement provides insight into the trends relative to the engagement of community college students in their educational experience. The survey demonstrated that engagement of students is vitally important to their academic success, persistence and ultimate graduation. Community colleges must be deliberate in their efforts to engage students and provide opportunities for students to actively engage the institution inside and outside the classroom. The engagement must involve personal interactions with other students, faculty and staff. The survey also demonstrated that engagement extends beyond coursework as noted for African American male student and that this engagement must be incorporated into the classroom.

### **Minority Student Persistence/Retention**

Racial minority students may have difficulty adjusting to college (Tinto, 1993) due to academic and social climates of higher education institutions. Additionally, financial issues (Braxton, Hirschy & McClendon, 2004; Nora, 1990; Parker, 1997) have been demonstrated to have significant influence on the persistence of racial minority students. Even the theories of biculturalism and dual socialization (Hurtado, 1997; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000; Zambrana, 1988) are cited as influences on the persistence of racial minority college students. Research also suggests that student involvement may not apply to students



exhibiting nontraditional characteristics and that racial minority students exhibit more of these characteristics than other groups. Finally, the literature suggests that African American students are subjected to racial discrimination at levels greater than other racial minority students and that these circumstances can have a negative effect upon persistence.

The U.S. Department of Education (2010) reported that persistence to graduation rates remain close to enrollment percentages for racial minority students. In the 2005-06 academic year, racial minority students received 32 percent and 27.6 percent of associate's and bachelor's degree awarded respectively. In subsequent years through 2008-09 the persistence to graduation rates have continued to remain close yet slightly below their enrollment percentages with these students receiving 30.2 percent of undergraduate degrees while comprising 35.7 percent of the enrollment (U.S. Dept. of Ed.). African American degree attainment rates also remained close yet below their enrollment percentages during the same period. Degree attainment increased from 10.6 percent in 2005 to 10.8 in 2009 while enrollment grew from 13 percent in 2005 to 14.7 percent in 2009 creating a slight increase (.5%) in the gap between these two measures.

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education (2009) reported in a longitudinal beginning postsecondary study of degree attainment and persistence low persistence and attainment rates for African American students as compared to students of other racial/ethnic backgrounds. African American students enrolling in a two-year institution in 2003-04 had the lowest persistence to degree rate over a three-year period, 11.1 percent for any degree and 5.8 percent for an associate's degree, of any racial/ethnic group. The study also reported

African Americans having the highest percent of the cohort with no degree and not enrolled at 52.6 percent. African American male students were at 6.6 percent for the associate's degree and 0.2 percent for the bachelor's degree. For students with no degree and not enrolled African American males had the highest percentage at 44.4. A second follow-up study was done in 2009 reporting data for a six-year period on the 2003-04 cohort. Again, African Americans had the lowest persistence to degree rate of any racial/ethnic group at 10.3 percent for an associate's degree and 6.2 percent for a bachelor's degree. African American male students were at 8.9 percent for the associate's degree and 17.1 percent for the bachelor's degree. For students with no degree and not enrolled African American males had the highest percentage at 44.3. This longitudinal study also showed African Americans had the second highest percent of the cohort with no degree and not enrolled at 49 percent, just behind Hispanics at 53.3 percent.

Much research has been done in the area of minority student persistence. However, many of the studies dealt with minority students as a group rather than disaggregating them into various racial or ethnic categories. There are also several theoretical perspectives regarding minority student persistence. One perspective is on the non-traditional status of many racial minority students in higher education. Although there is an increasing number of non-traditional students in four-year institutions, the vast majority of non-traditional students enroll in community colleges at least at first (Choy, 2002; Horn & Carroll, 1996). As has been previously noted nontraditional status is based on student characteristics that include delayed enrollment, part time attendance, full time employment, financial

independence for financial aid purposes, single parent, non-standard high school credential and dependents other than spouse (Horn, 1996). Horn also categorized students as minimally nontraditional (one characteristic) to highly non-traditional (four or more characteristics). He found that community college students who were highly nontraditional had lower rates of degree completion within three years of initial enrollment than did students with fewer nontraditional characteristics. Interestingly, research has indicated that significant percentages of racial minority students exhibit four or more nontraditional characteristics (O'Brien & Zudak, 1998).

Difficulty in persisting due to financial standing was demonstrated as an effect of financial independence of nontraditional minority students (Nora, 1990; Parker, 1997). Tinto (1993) related financial and low income status to difficulty in persistence. Choy (2002) found that financial independence as related to financial aid need was one of the nontraditional characteristics having the greatest effect upon persistence. Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon (2004) indicated that minorities have a special sensitivity to college costs. They posited that this sensitivity could lead to a failure to experience social integration, thus reducing institutional commitment and ultimately resulting in departure. This perspective provided a slightly different view of finances and persistence, citing financial difficulties as an indirect cause of departure.

As nontraditional students, many racial minority students do not see the need for social integration or socialization into the institution. Zambrana (1988) indicated that most racial minority students see the complete integration into the institution as futile because of

the perceived inevitable rejection within college life. Rendon (1994) found that involvement did not make the difference for nontraditional students. Rendon, Jalomo and Nora (2000) made similar claims based upon Rendon's earlier work. They challenged Tinto's theory of involvement indicating that nontraditional students did not need academic and social involvement in campus life. They further challenged Tinto regarding the effects of external factors on persistence and posited that external factors often have a positive influence on persistence and are not exclusively negative.

A second perspective on the persistence of racial minority students is that of the influence of institutional organizational culture. According to Tierney (1988) the organizational culture of a college or university consists of several concepts, including environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy and leadership. Kuh and Whitt (1988) offered a similar definition of organizational culture as consisting of institutional history, mission, physical settings, norms, traditions, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions. Kuh (2001) suggested that organizational culture is "something an institution has" and "something an institution does" (p. 24). The interaction of these concepts in creating the organizational culture helps students make meaning of their experiences of various events and activities on campus (Kuh, 2001).

Cultural assumptions, as an integral part of the organizational culture, contribute to an institutional philosophy which dictates policies and practices (Kuh, 2001). Cultural assumptions based upon historical legacy can influence organizational culture and climate. Hurtado (1992) posited that an institutional historic legacy of exclusion can establish the

predominant climate and influence current practice. Duster (1993) argued that historical legacy may serve to perpetuate an organizational culture at some institutions so as to maintain a hostile climate for racial minority students. This historical legacy might include resistance to desegregation, attitudes and behaviors that impede cross racial and cross ethnic interaction, and the maintenance of old policies that benefit a homogeneous student population.

In community colleges, as in universities, there are formal and informal cultures (Shaw, Valadez & Rhoads, 1999). The formal culture involves the administration and curriculum, while the informal culture involves the interaction between employees and students. The formal culture is defined by policies and practices while the informal culture is fluid and changing.

Given that most community colleges reflect the dominant societal culture, certain cultural values are considered normal and are referred to as cultural norms. Rhoads (1999) indicated that racial minority students in community colleges face this type of situation. He cited comments from faculty and administrators indicating that racial minority students lack either the ability or interest to pursue high academic goals. These attitudes often manifest themselves in the classroom impacting classroom experiences of the students which are vital in influencing motivation and persistence (Sanchez, 2000).

One outcome of negative faculty attitudes is the “stereotype vulnerability” of racial and ethnic minority students (Gandara & Maxwell-Jolly, 1999). Stereotype vulnerability is thought to be one reason why African Americans and other racial and ethnic minority

students perform poorly in the classroom. Gandara and Maxwell-Jolly further indicated that societal beliefs about the inferiority of some minorities negatively affects racial and ethnic minority students so that they become vulnerable to the stereotype bringing about a self fulfilling prophecy of low performance. Additionally, Obiakor and Obiakor (1997) posited that White professors usually maintain a more formal and often unfriendly relationship with racial minority students, resulting in a feeling of alienation on the part of the students. Zhai and Monzon (2001) found that White faculty members were often unprepared to teach these students and had negative attitudes toward them. Opp (2002) found that upon discovering many of these students were ill prepared academically, White faculty members were often unwilling to deal with these unprepared students.

Differential treatment via discrimination is a third factor in the persistence of racial minority students in higher education. Discrimination facilitates feelings of alienation (Oliver, Rodriguez & Michelson, 1985), intimidation (Freeman, 1997), segregation (Gosset et al., 1998), and isolation (Turner, 1994). Keith and Herring (1991) indicated that the more physically distinct from others one is, the more likely one is seen as out of the group. Nora and Cabrera (1996) stated that perceptions of differential treatment have been noted as one of the explanations for differences in persistence between White, African American, and Hispanic students. Eimers and Pike (1997) suggested that African Americans experience more differential treatment because they stand out more than any other minority group. Wyatt (1997) took this a step further, positing that the darker the skin-color, the higher the probability of being discriminated against.

There is empirical evidence (Feagin, 1992; Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Suárez-Balcázar, Orellana-Damacela, Portillo, Rowan, and Andrews-Guillen, 2003; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald & Bylsma, 2003; Sydell & Nelson, 2000) that racial discrimination against African American students still exists on college campuses in the U.S. Feagin (1992) found that African American students reporting such acts as White students telling racist jokes, making racist comments, and stereotyping of all African Americans. Feagin also found that African American students report racist attitudes from professors as well, and that the discriminatory environment on college campuses had caused many African American students to leave prior to graduation. Fisher and Hartmann (1995), McCormack (1995), and Ancis, Sedlacek and Mohr (2000) all found African American students experience differential treatment by faculty, teaching assistants and other students in a variety of campus situations.

Solórzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000) indicated that African American students cite racial discrimination attitudes and actions from faculty and students. They also indicated that students report racial microaggressions inside and outside the classroom. Jones, Castellanos and Cole (2002) spoke of students citing specific overt acts of racism from other students and the feeling of alienation resulting from these acts. Swim et al. (2003) reported on African American student experiences of verbal expressions of prejudice, bad service, staring and glaring, and rudeness. Suárez-Balcázar et al. (2003) examined the experiences of differential treatment of minority students in a Midwestern urban university. They discovered that differential treatment of racial minority students existed and that ethnic and racial

discrimination had a significant negative impact on racial minority student adjustment and persistence in college. Discrimination facilitated feelings of alienation, intimidation, segregation, and isolation for racial minority students, according to Suárez-Balcázar et al. More specifically, they found that African American students experience more occurrences of differential treatment in college-related situations than Hispanic, Asian; and Caucasian students. Additionally, this study showed that African American students were treated differently by faculty and their peers in classroom settings more frequently than any other students. All of the aforementioned studies provide evidence that there is differential treatment of African American students in higher education.

The previously discussed perspectives and research indicate that racial minority students have a persistence problem in higher education. The problem has been found to result from student nontraditional status, institutional organizational culture, and negative differential treatment of racial minority students within the institutions. Nevertheless there are possible methods that might be employed to increase these students' persistence. Rendon (1994) found that validation via encouragement and affirmation by someone either internal or external to the institution could make the positive difference for nontraditional students. Rendon, Jalomo and Nora (2000) concurred with this view suggesting that the institution must bear significant responsibility for the successful adaptation of students into the institutional culture.

In addition to the usefulness of validation as a means to increase persistence, an understanding of the differences in learning styles and preferences based upon cultural and



ethnic backgrounds may be key. Jonassen and Grabowski (1993) posited a model that suggests that learners perceive instruction differently based upon individual difference filters. These filters may enhance or impede learning relative to the instructional approach used. Dunn and Griggs (1995) reported that specific cultural groups have learning styles that are distinctly different from other cultural groups. For example, Native Americans and Hispanics learn better by participating in active concrete learning experiences (Sánchez, 2000). These students prefer group activities that incorporate real life situations and require cooperative learning. Szelenyi (2001) supported the notion that culture affects learning preferences and learning styles, stating that research has shown an association between cultural backgrounds and preferred learning styles. She further indicated that African Americans tend to be more successful academically when oral and interpersonal relationships are incorporated into instruction.

These various learning style differences are significant because of the nature of higher education the U.S. Hirschy and Wilson (2002) noted that American higher education follows a dominant “Euro-American Western” (p. 91) culture. This culture reflects norms that emphasize competition, individual achievement, and task orientation. In contrast, minority cultures emphasizes group cooperation and achievement. Students from racial and ethnic minority cultures struggle when material is presented ways that differ from their natural learning style. Therefore, faculty should employ various techniques that cater to the various learning styles of diverse student groups. Hirschy and Wilson suggested collaborative and cooperative learning methods as useful to promote success of students with varied learning

styles. Collaborative learning has been found to be significantly associated with an increase in positive self-perception (Colbeck, Cabrera & Terenzini, 2000). Cooperative learning helps create a sense of community and promotes support for diverse learning styles (Kreke, Fields & Towns, 1998).

There are also efforts that institutions can make to reduce the negative differential treatment of racial minority students. Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson and Allen (1998) suggested institutions that historically have practiced exclusion must acknowledge their history and the detrimental impact it may have on campus life. This acknowledgement may garner support for desegregation efforts to create a more diverse student body. Chang (2000) acknowledged the history of exclusion and the realization that this history represents a sense of stability for the institution. Institutions must somehow overcome the fear of losing stability and embrace their role in addressing the concerns of each new generation.

Hurtado et al. (1998) further indicated that the campus psychological climate might be strengthened by providing sensitivity training to the college community to eliminate myths and stereotypes about racial minority students. Love, Trammell and Cartner (2010) also suggested various training and educational programs to create a campus climate that is equitable and fair for all minority students. Gregory (2000) suggested that institutions must provide structured, intensive opportunities for contact among students from diverse racial backgrounds. Love, Trammell and Cartner further suggested structured forums for interactions between groups of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Institutions must do

all they possibly can to insure that students perceive the institutional climate as fair and just for all.

Racial minority students' degree attainment rate remained below their enrollment rate through fall 2009. African American student degree attainment rates remained below their enrollment rate as well in 2009. A longitudinal study on students enrolling in a two-year institution during 2003-04 showed that African American students had the lowest persistence to degree attainment rate of any racial/ethnic group over three-year and six-year periods. Racial minority students face various obstacles when attempting to earn a higher education degree which are primarily related to the academic and social climates of higher education institutions (Tinto, 1993). Various factors impede their adjustment to college, including student nontraditional status, institutional organizational culture, and negative differential treatment (Choy, 2002; Duster, 1993; Feagin & Pike, 1997; Gandara & Maxwell-Jolly, 1999; Horn & Carroll, 1996; Kuh, 2001; Obiakor & Obiakor, 1997; O'Brien & Zudak, 1998; Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Suárez-Balcázar et al., 2003; Swim et al, 2003).

Various methods have been found to increase racial minority student persistence in higher education. Validation via encouragement, addressing different learning styles, and reducing negative differential treatment are methods recommended by research studies (Colbeck, Cabrera & Terenzini, 2000; Dunn & Griggs, 1995; Hurtado et al., 1998; Love, Trammell & Carter, 2009; Rendon, 1994; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000).

## **African American Male Persistence**

Research indicates that the African American male may be affected by discrimination and racism when it comes to education (Cross & Slater, 2000; Davis, 2003; Jenkins, 2006; Slaughter-Defoe & Richards, 1994). My interest lies in the persistence of African American male students in higher education and in the community college. I present in the next few paragraphs what the literature says regarding this particular group and persistence in higher education generally and the community college specifically.

Statistical data indicates that African American male college students do not graduate at rates comparable to other groups. African American males were 4.7 percent of the total undergraduate population in 2005 but received only 3.3 percent of the degrees awarded (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2007). Additionally, in 2009 enrollment increased to 5.3 percent for African American males but they earned only 3.5 percent of undergraduate degrees. They fared no better in community colleges and other two-year institutions, earning only 4.1 percent of associate degrees awarded in 2008-2009. During the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century African American male community college students earned associate degrees at lower rate as compared to other males averaging only 9.9 percent of associate degrees awarded (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2010).

Three-year persistence to the associate's degree attainment for African American male students in the 2003-04 cohort enrolling in two-year institutions was 6.6 percent as compared to 7.9 percent for White males, 6.5 percent for Hispanic males and 4.9 percent for Asian males. Figures for persistence to the bachelor's degree were 0.2 percent for African

American males, 1.3 percent for White male, 0.3 percent for Hispanic males and 0.9 percent for Asian males. Six-year statistics for persistence to degree show that for the associate's degree African American males at 8.8 percent fell behind White males and Native American males at 9.6 percent and 11.2 percent respectively. Asian and Hispanic males had the two lowest persistence rates at 6.2 percent and 8.2 percent respectively (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2009). These statistics show that African American males are persisting at comparable rates with most male students of other ethnic groups for the associate's degree over three and six-year periods. However, African American males are not persisting at comparable rates with male students of other ethnic groups for the bachelor's degree over three and six-year periods. In the three-year follow-up of the cohort, African American males were next to last for persistence, just ahead of Native American males. Similarly, in the six-year follow-up they were next to last, just ahead of Hispanic males.

Kunjufu (1986) posited a failure syndrome such that by fourth grade African American males determine that the educational system fails to meet their learning needs. They then internalize these attitudes and develop inferiority complexes relative to schooling in general. Steele (1991) also identified this problem, coining the term "anti-self" (p. 41) to describe an internal antagonistic self that accepts the world's negative view of African Americans as undeserving. In short, African American male college students are arriving at college campuses quit often ill-prepared as a result of poor schooling, financial difficulties and other social and cultural stigmas (Cuyjet, 1997). Further, their long-standing low academic self-esteem may be the greatest detriment to their studies overall.

Davis (1994) studied African American male students in higher education examining campus environment and academic achievement. He found that when the racial make up of the institution was largely something other than African American, African American males did not perform well academically. To get a comprehensive view of African American male college students, Cuyjet (1997) examined national data from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). National data paint an interesting picture of African American male students in higher education. The CSEQ revealed that African American male student usually do not take detailed notes in class and that many do not take notes at all. Only 23 percent of African American men spend five hours or more writing a paper. The survey demonstrated that African American men fail to develop linkages with other students that could enhance their learning process, and that they tend to have more concerns regarding finances for college expenses. Cuyjet also found that African American male students tend not to participate in formal extracurricular activities; rather, they tended to participate in informal activities such as ping-pong, cards, pool and pinball. Additionally he found that these students frequent athletic and other recreational facilities for indoor and outdoor casual athletic activities.

Hall and Rowan (2000) also conducted a study of African American males in higher education. They wanted to discover the characteristic differences between African American males and the higher education institutions they attend, and to determine the reasons given by African American males for decreasing enrollment and graduation from higher education institutions. Results from the study indicated that there is a cultural schism between African

American males and institutions of higher education, and that racism exists as a significant hindrance to enrollment, persistence, and graduation of African American males from higher education institutions.

Is the African American male college student so different from other students relative to needs that support academic success? Fries-Britt (1997) discussed the Meyerhoff Scholars Program and its use of study groups and program community as means of establishing peer support among African American males as well as other students at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. In 1998 she conducted a study involving gifted African Americans at the university and found that involvement in the program provided much needed peer support and diminished the feeling of isolation resulting in greater academic success. She further indicated in the study that programs like the Meyerhoff program are important to institutional student retention efforts, since these programs can positively impact student integration into the larger campus community. Other mentoring programs have been found to have a very positive impact on persistence of African American male college students (Brown, 2006; Pope, 2002, 2006; Stromei, 2000; Szelenyi, 2001). Further, Harper (2006) found that African American male students from six large public universities reported that peer support enhanced the quality of their experiences and much of their academic success at the predominantly White universities. What was special for successful African American male students was the acceptance and respect from other African American male students, even those who were not very actively involved in the political and social campus life. Brown (2006) noted that programs and activities promoting student-to-student interactions are

important to the academic success of African American male college students. Additionally, Harper demonstrated that peer support as a factor for academic success and persistence is similar for African American males and the general college student population.

Researchers such as Fleming, Vella, Fries-Britt, Dawson-Threat and Spradley agreed that student-faculty relationships are important for African American male student academic success. Fleming (1984) demonstrated that senior African American male students at predominantly white institutions were very concerned about student-faculty relationships and that relationships with faculty had a negative impact on their academic performance. Vella (1994) suggested that the adult African American male student has a need to believe that faculty members are fairly evaluating them, working to help them be successful, and are considerate of their various life roles. Fries-Britt (1997) cited faculty involvement in the Meyerhoff Program as another avenue to enhance student success. Faculty in the program involved themselves with students both in and out of the classroom setting. Dawson-Threat (1997) also posited the importance of student-faculty relationships for African American male students regardless of the institutional type or college environment. However Bush and Bush (2010) found that student-faculty interaction was a strong predictor of African American male community college student retention as well as transfer rates and higher GPA's. If there is a strain on the student-faculty relationship precipitated by insensitive evaluations or intimidating questions, the faculty member may be viewed as a cause of failure rather than a facilitator of success (Spradley, 2001).



A special mentoring program at the University of Louisville demonstrated that student-faculty relationships can facilitate positive academic outcomes for African American male students (LaVant, Anderson & Tiggs, 1997). Two cohorts of mentored students had retention rates of approximately 66 percent, which was close to the university's overall retention rate of 74.9 percent. Patitu (2000), in studying college choice and satisfaction of African American male students, found that a significant number of participants cited "great professors" (p. 85) as a factor in their satisfaction with the institution. Some students indicated that they felt that faculty members were sincerely interested in them as students and had made special effort to be of assistance.

Finally, Gonsalves (2002) addressed the pitfall of cross-racial interactions between White faculty and African American male students. Gonsalves emphasized the importance of faculty cultivating relationships with these students because it fosters the student's personal and intellectual growth. As has been previously mentioned, African American male students have a need to believe that faculty members are genuinely concerned about them and their academic success. The literature seems to support the notion that relative to peer support and student-faculty relationships, the African American male college student is no different from other college students. The literature (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Hall & Rowan, 2000; Singer, 2005) also indicates that African American college students, including African American male students, have been the recipients of differential treatment resulting from racial discrimination rather than the support from peers and faculty they seek.

According to some authors extracurricular activity may be linked to African American male student persistence. Cuyjet (1997) found that African American male students tend not to participate in formal extracurricular activities and tend not to attend campus organizational and club meetings nor read the campus newspaper. Turner (2000) indicated as well that there is a lack of participation of traditional age African American male students in formal extracurricular activities. Harper (2004) noted similar findings indicating that the fascination with athletic activities correlates to a specific conceptualization of masculinity. Spradely (2001) summed up the various notions regarding extracurricular activity of young African American males indicating that they seem not to see the importance in participating in extracurricular activities. Spradley further indicated that extracurricular activities support the success of African American male students in higher education, including the adult African American male student. The extracurricular activities that adult African American male students quite often involve themselves in are community related and do not involve themselves in extracurricular campus activities.

The community college enrolls significant number of African American males and statistical data demonstrate that persistence rates for these students are among the lowest of any racial minority group in the U.S. (Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2001). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2010), African American men earned only 4.1 percent of all associate degrees awarded in 2008-09. One reason for the very low associate degree attainment of this group could be attributed to the varied educational goals of community college students. Cohen and Brawer (1996), Voorhees and Zhou (2000), and Wild and

Ebbers (2002) all concur that community college students have diverse educational goals that often don't involve earning a degree.

Notwithstanding the varied goals of community college students, African American male students in community colleges are not achieving academically as well as other students, and research specifically targeting the African American male in community colleges is sparse. The following few paragraphs discuss literature found to date specifically on African American male students in community colleges.

Mason (1998) posited a persistence model for African American male urban community college students based upon a study conducted at an inner city Chicago community college. After interviewing African American male students who did or did not return after the fall semester, as well as analyzing survey responses that included questions on academic, background and environmental variables, Mason proposed a model for African American male persistence. The model posits four major factors that influence persistence for African American male students in community colleges: (1) educational goals, (2) outside encouragement, (3) utility, and (4) helplessness/hopelessness. Mason found that students with clear goals concerning what they wanted to achieve, accompanied by deep internalization of those goals, were more likely to persist. Relative to outside encouragement, Mason found that the greater the support from outside the college, the more likely the student was to persist. Mason also found that the significant other that seemed to have the most positive influence on the African American male student was a significant female (mother, wife, girlfriend). Additionally, Wilson-Sadberry, Royster and Winfield

(1991), Allen (1992) and Barnett (2004) indicated that familial support is important to the academic success of African American college students. Barnett's work in particular supported Mason's findings regarding the importance of a significant female, noting that African American college students garnered support from their mothers first because mothers were more often the emotional base for the students. Others studies (Stewart & Vaux, 1985; Wright, 1984) noted the significance of family support indicating that it served as a source of strength and survival. Gloria, Robinson-Kurplus, Hamilton, and Wilson (1999) found that family support was one of two strong predictors of persistence for African American students at predominantly white institutions (PWI's). Finally, Bonner and Bailey (2006) noted the importance of family to the academic success of African American college students and stated, "Encouragement and support from the family unit, through accolades and admonishment, is translated into student academic commitment and persistence" (p. 29).

Utility as a factor influencing persistence centers on whether the student truly believes that the program of study will benefit his future. If that belief is strong it is more likely the student will persist (Mason, 1998). The helplessness/hopelessness factor proposes that many students believed that regardless of efforts or academic success, they will not be able to transfer academic success into employment success (Mason). These students are therefore less likely to persist. This factor is similar to the academic futility factor identified by Spradlin, Welsh and Hinson (2000). Additionally, Mason's findings support Jalomo (1995), who posited that external factors or agents serve as a bridge for assisting students transitioning into higher education institutions.

Hagedorn, Maxwell and Hampton (2001) conducted a study at a large suburban community college on the West Coast with the purpose of determining significant factors that would predict persistence of African American males. They also sought to determine whether factors promoting persistence through the first semester fostered persistence through the second and third semesters. Data were collected and analyzed on student characteristics, college experiences and persistence. Independent variables included pre-college factors (social and educational), academic ability (institutional and self assessment), college experiences, and external experiences. Results indicated that, for all three semesters, being younger was a significant predictor of persistence. The researchers suggested that younger men may feel more comfortable or may integrate better into the institution environment. Hagedorn, Maxwell and Hampton further found that persistence through the second and third semesters was significantly predicted by high school GPA and that low self-assessment of ability was significant in predicting attrition in the second semester. Thus, if African American men think that they can handle the academic challenge of the community college, they are more likely to persist through the second semester. Further, African American men who place a high degree of personal importance on college completion are more likely to persist through semesters two and three.

Another study on the persistence of African American male community college students conducted by Glenn (2003) examined practices that contributed to the academic success of these students in the Texas public community colleges. The purpose of the study was to determine what factors contributed to high graduation percentages in certain

community colleges. Community colleges with the most success in graduating African American males were designated as the top quartile and community colleges with the least success were designated as the bottom quartile. Results revealed that at least 50 percent of colleges in the top quartile provided freshman-only advising programs and orientation courses for credit while only 43 percent and 29 percent respectively of colleges in the bottom quartile had similar offerings. Additionally, 60 percent of top quartile schools had mandatory tutoring while only 29 percent of bottom quartile colleges did so, and 40 percent of top quartile colleges required some at-risk students to meet with their advisors periodically compared to only 14 percent of colleges in the bottom quartile. Finally, the study revealed that 70 percent of the top quartile colleges monitored at-risk student attendance and 30 percent of these schools targeted minority groups with strategies to enhance retention. In comparison, only 43 percent of bottom quartile colleges monitored attendance and 14 percent targeted minority groups with retention strategies. A case study from one institution within the top quartile substantiated previous evidence and that the top quartile college had a close knit, friendly campus culture and helpful faculty members. It was noted in the study that any of the Texas public community colleges could implement these strategies to enhance the success of African American male graduation rate.

Glenn (2003) further demonstrated that community colleges can affect the graduation rates of African American male students. There are certain strategies (mentoring, tutoring, attendance monitoring, etc.) that colleges can implement that appear to positively impact the

retention of African American male students and ultimately their graduation rates.

Additionally, this study demonstrated the importance of campus culture on persistence.

The literature reviewed herein relative to the persistence of African American male students in higher education reveals several themes. First, many African American male colleges students are arriving at college ill-prepared and suffering from various social stigmas (Cuyjet, 1997). Secondly, these students are no different from other college students in terms of their need to be academically successful. Whether in four year institutions or community colleges, the African American male college student requires peer support (Fries-Britt, 1997; Glenn, 2003; Harper, 2006), positive student-faculty relationships (Dawson-Threat, 1997; Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt, 1997; Gonzalves, 2002; Vella, 1994), and cultural congruency with some diversity (Hall & Rowan, 2001) to be academically successful.

Within the community college setting, African American male student persistence is positively affected when students have clear academic goals and are committed to those goals (Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2001; Mason, 1998). Secondly, African American male students who have a clear understanding of the utility of the academic endeavor for future opportunities are more likely to persist (Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2001; Mason, 1998). Finally, community colleges can enhance the academic success and retention of African American males through programs designed to meet identified needs (Glenn, 2003; Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2001). Other factors such as outside encouragement (Mason), good academic self-concept (Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton), and a friendly

campus culture were also identified as positive influences on the persistence of African American males in community colleges.

### **Organizational Culture and Structure Theories**

As we consider various theories of student persistence in higher education we must consider the higher education organization as well as the student. Much of the literature already discussed (Bean, 1980; Bean & Metzner, 1980, 1985; Berger & Milem, 1999; Choy, 2002; Elkins, Braxton & James, 2000; Tinto, 1975, 1987; Vorhees, 1987; Voorhees & Zhou, 2000; Wild & Ebbers, 2002) focuses on student characteristics and why students do or do not persist. There are theories and empirical studies focusing on the institution and its organizational structure and culture, and how these factors influence student persistence. It is important, however, at this juncture to make a distinction between student persistence and student retention.

Persistence, according to the *American Heritage College Dictionary* (2000) is the state or quality of being persistent. The *American Heritage College Dictionary* defines persistent as refusing to give up or let go (pg. 1019). In the context of this study, then, persistence relates to what the student does to remain enrolled as indicated in Chapter 1. Retain, according to the *American Heritage College Dictionary*, is to maintain possession of or to keep in a particular place (pg. 1164). Subsequently, retention is defined as the act of retaining (*American Heritage College Dictionary*). For purposes of this study, retention relates to what the institution does to keep students enrolled as indicated in Chapter 1. With this distinction in mind, the next several paragraphs discuss theories and research on



organizational culture and its impact on student persistence and colleges' ability to retain students.

Tierney (1988) posited that organizational culture is “grounded in the shared assumptions of individuals participating in the organization” (pg. 4). These assumptions are conveyed in stories, special language, norms, institutional ideology, and attitudes arising from individual and organizational behavior. Simply put “an organization’s culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it” (pg. 3), according to Tierney. He suggested that higher education administrators must have a full understanding of the organizational culture to make tough decisions that can and will move the organization in a positive direction. Often administrators become painfully aware of organizational culture when they violate its boundaries or norms and severe conflicts or strained relationships result. A fully nuanced understanding of the organizational culture facilitates informed decisions that will more likely bring purpose to the organization rather than conflict. Therefore, Tierney suggested that colleges and universities be analyzed as an interconnected web or system which can only be understood by examining its structure, natural laws, and actors’ interpretations of that web.

Tierney (1988) provided a framework for those interested in an anthropological type study of an institution of higher education. The framework outlines six components or concepts that would guide the investigation of organizational culture. They are:

- Environment—how is it defined and what is the attitude toward it?

- Mission—how is it defined and articulated? Is it used for decision making and how much agreement is there?
- Socialization—how are members socialized and how is it articulated? What knowledge is necessary to survive and excel in the organization?
- Information—what constitutes information? Who has it and how is it disseminated?
- Strategy—how are decisions made and what are the strategies used? Who makes decisions? What penalty results from bad decisions?
- Leadership—who are the leaders (formal & informal)? What is expected of the leaders? (p. 8)

Tierney posited that his framework provides a mechanism for assessing organizational culture that will assist administrators in becoming change agents in their institutions.

When discussing organizational culture in higher education, there are several theories to consider. The systems theory is one such theory. Systems can be either open or closed. Scott (1987) indicated that an open system always depends upon the environment with which it exchanges matter, energy and information. It is capable of self-maintenance based upon throughput of resources from the environment. The open system also has subsystems that have individual functioning parts. Organizations, including colleges and universities, are considered open systems according to Scott. The structure of the higher education organization has an established hierarchy with work groups often referred to as program faculty and staff that make up the subsystems of this open system. Each subsystem is a component of the larger system composed of institutional schools, departments, and

programs that are loosely connected. Higher education institutions, as open systems, are dependent upon the external environment for the exchange of matter (students), energy (funding), and information (federal and state policies, demographic and economy). As ‘matter’, the students are transformed into the ‘product’ of an educated individual as a result of the instructional process and other interactions within the organization.

A second theory regarding organizational culture is that of the learning organization posited by Senge (1990). Senge proposed that the learning organization is possible because we all are learners. His theory is born out of systems thinking which is key to the learning organization concept. The four core principles of the learning organization theory are: (1) personal mastery--a deepening of one’s personal vision; (2) mental models--ingrained assumptions of the organization; (3) shared vision--the creation of a common identity within the organization; and (4) team learning; insightful coordinated action with clear team member roles.

Viewing higher education institutions as learning organizations is an interesting concept. The institutions meet the qualifications for being designated as systems, but must practice systems thinking as posited by Senge (1990) to be considered true learning organizations. Members must see wholes rather than individual components. It is the responsibility of institutional leaders to promote systems thinking. Rowley (1998) suggested that learning organizations engage in continuous processes of organizational transformation. For the transformation to occur the institution must establish a learning strategy that is a core component of all institutional operations and includes individual and organizational learning.

She further suggested that, in the case of higher education the institution must “extend the focus of learning from the classroom and the research laboratory to the wider organisation, so that the organisation creates and disseminates knowledge that informs the development of the organisation” (pg.19). Popper and Lipshitz (2000) posited something very similar referring to a “learning culture” (pg. 132) as essential to achieving and sustaining organizational learning in higher education.

Bolman and Deal’s (1991) theory of four organizational frames may also apply to higher education institutions. The four frames are structural, human resources, political, and symbolic. The structural frame emphasizes formal roles within the organization both vertical and lateral. Vertical controls use the chain of command within a hierarchy, while lateral controls involve formal and informal meetings using task forces to solve problems or complete projects. How these controls are used depends upon the organization’s mission and environment. The second frame, human resources, views people as the core of the organization. There is a reciprocal relationship that is to be established between the organization and the employees. The major task of managers is to establish an organization and management system that foster harmony between the needs of the individuals and those of the organization and secure employee commitment and loyalty. The third frame, the political, views the organization as a place of political arenas harboring a diverse array of individual and group interests. Each group has a particular agenda and special interests in organizational policies and rules, as well as its own internal leadership. The fourth and final frame, the symbolic, emphasizes meaning and that rituals and ceremonies are significant in

establishing meaning. These rituals are day to day activities which reflect and express the organization's culture, which depicts the beliefs, values, practices and artifacts that define the organization's members. Ceremonies occur less frequently and are usually grand and elaborate. Rituals and ceremonies serve four major roles: to socialize, to stabilize, to reduce anxieties and ambiguities for organization members, and to impart messages to the internal and external environment.

The theories discussed in this section provide a framework for understanding how organizations function. Organizations have a culture arising from collective and individual behavior (Tierney, 1988). These organizations are systems composed of many subsystems (Scott, 1987) and are transformational as they react to the environment, making them learning organizations (Rowley, 1998; Senge, 1990). The culture of organizations may be based upon their structure, human resources, political climate, symbolic rituals or any combination thereof (Bolman & Deal, 1991).

Higher education institutions, as organizations, possess cultures that may impact employees and students. These various organizational theories discussed above may be related to how people, including students, connect with a higher education institution and whether they choose to stay connected or depart. The culture of an institution may also affect the ways diversity and inclusion are operationalized. The next section describes how organizational structures and culture may affect student persistence.

## **Organizational Culture and Persistence**

These theories on organizational culture may come into play as we examine the phenomenon of student persistence. They may also explain some of the steps colleges and universities take to retain students. Organizations are systems; consequently, higher education institutions as organizations are systems. More specifically they are open systems with an established hierarchy, within which there is vertical and horizontal control. Administrators attempt to create a shared vision as the institution takes in and processes information from the external environment. Ultimately, the processing of the various forms of information influences what is done in the instructional process of students. Additionally, organizations have structure and human resources. They also are political and have various symbolic rituals and ceremonies. Higher education institutions are organizations and possess some, if not all, of the organizational frames defined by Bolman and Deal (1991). Consequently, these frames influence how the institution interacts with students and thereby influence persistence.

How then, does the organization's culture impact the students' experiences and, ultimately persistence? According to Kuh (2001), organizational culture may help make meaning of the student's experiences of various events and activities on campus. Culture is both something the institution has and something it does, according to Kuh. Norms and traditions affect student perceptions of the institution and how they make meaning of events and activities. It is also important to note that students' perceptions are influenced by their own cultural orientations, which means that each student will experience college differently.

Kuh (2001) indicated that the size of the institution influences the degree of impact the overall institutional culture has on persistence. Larger colleges and universities have many subcultures that may have even more of an impact on persistence. There may not exist an overarching institutional culture; however, participating in these subcultures may facilitate a sense of comfort and affirmation for students within the larger institutional culture, and this positively impacts persistence. According to Kuh, there are three types of student subcultures that can exist in an institution. The enhancing subculture is the first type and it is one where values reinforce those of the institution. Examples of this would be organizations such as school clubs and service organizations. Second, is the orthogonal subculture which reflects values that are generally congruent with the institution, with the exception of some that are distinctly different from those of the institution. Examples of this type of subculture are non-revenue generating athletics like tennis, track or soccer, and residence hall groups. The third type, according to Kuh, is the countercultural subculture. This subculture has values that generally conflict with those of the institution. Examples of this subculture might be fraternities and football teams.

These subcultures speak about the institutional culture from the student perspective; however, there is an overall culture that is more institution driven. Kuh (2001) posited several ideas about organizational culture and student persistence. The first is that colleges and universities that have a coherent philosophy and value structure and clear expectations for student performance will have a greater influence on students. This idea relates to Senge (1990) and the learning organization's shared vision. Policies and practices develop out of

the shared vision or philosophy and can be a powerful influence on student persistence.

According to Kuh, the assumption is that the organizational culture of a college or university can exercise influence over matriculating students.

The second idea about organizational culture and student persistence is that institutional cultures that value and celebrate community have higher student retention (Kuh, 2001). A strong community atmosphere is characterized by valuing diversity, good internal communication, caring, shared leadership, links to the external environment, shared governance, internal personal development, trust and teamwork, and shared culture (Gardner, 1989). There is, however, a down side to a strong community atmosphere. There may be certain students that, in order to conform to the overall institutional community may have to give up much of their original culture and ultimately this negatively affects persistence (Kuh, 2001). Consequently, institutions must maintain a delicate balance so that students do not feel they have to abandon their cultural identity to become a part of the institutional culture.

Kuh's (2001) third idea is that residential campuses have stronger and more engaging cultures that better facilitate conforming behavior resulting in higher persistence and graduation rates. The issue of proximity is essential, according to Kuh, since it brings students and faculty in contact with each other more frequently so that philosophies and values become more evident. In some instances, student peer groups can be more powerful influences on persistence than other institutional factors. The fourth idea focused on students' response to strong institutional coherent cultures. Kuh posited that students in this type of institution learn early what is expected of them to succeed via their socialization in



the various campus groups they join. This idea is related to Tinto's (1993) concept of social and academic integration. Kuh's fifth and final idea is that when there is a large discrepancy between a student's subculture and the institution's academic values and expectations, the student is less likely to persist.

Kuh (2001) offered suggestions about what colleges and universities can do to create a cultural climate that enhances their retention and graduation rates. He offered these guidelines for success-oriented campus culture.

1. Clarify institutional values and expectations early and often.
2. Conduct a comprehensive examination of the student experience inside and outside the classroom.
3. Consistently use good practices in teaching, learning, and retention programs.
4. Purposely tie curriculum to students' life experiences outside of the classroom.  
This procedure fosters interaction outside of the classroom.
5. Remove disciplinary culture obstacles to students' success (gateway courses, curriculum smorgasbord).
6. Determine the impact of sub-cultural peer groups on persistence. (pp. 32-36)

The keys to developing an institution that is student success oriented is to capture the power of the peer group, focus on the classroom experience, and learn more about student experiences beyond the freshman year since students spend more and more time off campus in communities not influenced by the campus culture.

Berger (2001) approached retention slightly differently, utilizing the term organizational behavior in reference to organizational culture. He posited that organizational behavior is multidimensional, much like the Bolman and Deal (1991) four organizational frames theory. Berger identified bureaucratic, collegial, political, symbolic and systemic as the five aspects of his multidimensional organizational behavior. Each aspect has unique effects on persistence. Utilizing the five dimensions of organizational behavior Berger proposed three patterns of organizational behavior (competitive, casual, and cohesive). Competitive behavior has low collegiality, medium symbolic, systemic and bureaucratic, and high political dimensions. Casual behavior has low bureaucracy and medium collegiality, symbolic, systemic, and political. Finally, cohesive behavior has low political and systemic dimensions, with high collegiality, symbolic and bureaucracy. According to Berger, competitive organizations have the greatest negative impact on humanistic values and community service involvement of students. In earlier work, Berger and Milem (1999) found that students who do not become involved early in their collegiate experience are less likely to persist. Cohesive organizations had the greatest impact on both humanistic values and community service involvement of students; institutions of this type are more than likely to have the greatest positive impact on persistence. A particularly interesting finding of Berger's 2001 study was that the institutions most often determined to be cohesive were HBCU institutions. It is also interesting to note that HBCUs tend to have higher graduation rates for African Americans than predominantly White institutions (PWT's) (Allen, 1987, 1992; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson & Allen, 1998).

It was important to this study of African American male persistence to have some idea of the impact of organizational culture on student persistence in community colleges. Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Kienzl, and Leinbach (2005) examined institutional factors affecting the success of community college students. They found that students at larger institutions were less likely to graduate than those in smaller colleges. Additionally, Bailey et al. found that those attending rural colleges were more likely to have positive student outcomes than students attending urban and suburban institutions. We know that larger institutions tend to have a more bureaucratic organizational culture and that high bureaucracy has a negative impact on persistence (Berger, 2001). Bailey et al. posited that smaller institutions may provide a more personalized environment or may have fewer and more focused programs. Somewhat in contrast to other theorists discussed above, the conclusion drawn by Bailey et al. is that, for community colleges, student characteristics appear to have more of an impact on graduation and persistence than institutional characteristics.

As noted earlier, Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon (2004) found that campus environment is important to persistence and that the organizational characteristics of the institution determine campus environment. Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon also indicated that commitment to student welfare and institutional integrity indirectly affects persistence. When students perceive that faculty and staff are committed to their welfare, then students become more committed to the institution. Student welfare becomes part of the faculty mantra when it is established as a shared vision and philosophy of the learning organization, as described by Senge (1990).

According to Kuh (2001), organizational culture helps students make meaning of their experiences in a higher education institution. Kuh indicated that institutional size, celebrating community, strength of campus culture, and how institutions manage incongruence of student original culture and institutional culture all impact persistence. Various types of institutional culture have varying influences on persistence. It is important to note that institutional view of diversity contributes to the overall institutional culture. Institutions with a cohesive culture have the greatest positive impact on persistence. Some research has shown that student characteristics influence persistence more than institutional characteristic do (Bailey et al., 2005), while others note that campus environment which is determined by institutional characteristics is important to student persistence (Braxton, Hirschy & McClendon, 2004).

### **Conceptual Framework - Critical Race Theory**

Many researchers have examined persistence of college students generally, as well as persistence of racial and ethnic minorities and African American male college students. The conceptual framework for most of this research has been Tinto's (1975) interactionist theory of departure or other theories that expand on Tinto's work (Bean 1980, 1990; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1978, 1980; Pascarella, Terenzini & Nora, 1999). Tinto (1975) says that students make decisions about departure from college based upon their degree of academic and social integration into the college community. This current study uses a different lens through which to view persistence in higher education: Critical Race Theory.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is derived from racial formation theory which posits a process involving the creation, inhabitation, transformation and destruction of racial categories (Omi & Winant, 1994). The predominance of one racial group over another is an integral part of this process. According to Omi and Winant race is a consequence of social structure and cultural representation. They link racial formation to the development of hegemony, in which one group is situated in a dominant position over all other social groups. The dominant group then proceeds to establish a society in which they are privileged and those who are subjugated have little or no privilege at all. The society is structured in such a way as to convince all or almost all to believe that this dominant/subordinate relationship is the natural order of things.

Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman are credited with initiating Critical Race Theory in legal writings in the 1970s (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Taylor, 1998). Three propositions are offered as the impetus for CRT based upon racial formation theory. The first proposition is that race continues as a significant factor relative to inequality in the United States. From the days of Garter G. Woodson and W. E. B. DuBois, race has been viewed as a means of propagating social inequity within the U.S., according to Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995). Evidence of social inequity can be seen in school drop out rates, characteristics of the poor, incarceration statistics and failure of males in racial minority groups. For instance, according to Petite and Western (2004), African American male prisoners outnumber white prisoners by eight to one. Further, in 2000, twenty seven percent

of Hispanics and 13.1 percent of African Americans dropped out of high school compared to only 6.9 percent of Whites (Kaufman, Alt & Chapman, 2001).

The second proposition of CRT states that the issue of property rights is foundational in U. S. society (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). Throughout U.S. history, property rights have been in conflict with human rights. Government was to protect property and slaves were considered property, thus leading to a conflict between property rights and human rights. Historical scholarship reveals that property rights prevailed and continue to prevail in the dominant Euro-centric culture (Bell, 1987; Takaki, 1993; Zinn, 1980). This conflict continued into the civil rights era, and laws to bring about change were ultimately ineffective because they were undermined by societal structure. In other words, even through its laws this nation was not intent on providing equal protection for humans in general, but rather for humans who were property owners.

The third proposition underpinning CRT states that property and education relate explicitly and implicitly. This proposition suggests that those with more valuable property should have better schools. Kozol (1991) illustrated this concept by citing the inequities in expenditures per pupil in New York State. The average expenditure per pupil in New York City at that time was \$5,500. However, in the wealthy suburbs of New York expenditure per pupil reached as high as \$11,000. Kozol posited that quality and quantity of education are manifestations of inequity and property. The curriculum in the schools of the wealthy offers much more variety and quality based upon the resources allocated.

It is important to understand that the inequities in primary and secondary schools bleed into post-secondary schools through their effects on racial and ethnic minority students. Desegregation was to eliminate the ‘separate but equal’ adage and bring about equality in primary and secondary education for all children in the U.S., but specifically for African American children. Instead, what occurred was white flight to suburban communities and more segregated urban schools (Banks, 1991; Orfield, 1988; Hawley, 1988; & Schofield, 1989). Primarily minority students populate the urban schools but the tax dollars shifted to the more affluent communities (Kozol, 1991). The inevitable results were inner city students who were ill prepared for any post-secondary educational opportunities. These poorly prepared students now populate our nation’s community colleges seeking a better life through higher education. Critical Race Theory identifies what are considered flaws within society and its educational system that sabotage the success of racial minorities generally and academically. The three aforementioned propositions collectively emphasize that race continues to be a significant factor relative to inequality in the U.S. and property rights are the basis for U.S. society. Further, property rights prevail over human rights, and property and education are linked explicitly and implicitly.

### **Five Tenets of Critical Race Theory**

Bell (1987, 1989, 1993, 1996), Crenshaw (1988, 1993), Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller and Thomas (1995), Delgado (1989, 1990), Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995), Ladson-Billings (1998), Solorzano and Yosso (2001), Tate IV (1997), and Yosso (2002) are among the noted scholars who have written on CRT. Some of these writers have approached CRT

from the legal view while others have approached it from an educational view. Regardless of the approach, the following tenets or elements of CRT are held in common:

- a. Race and racism are endemic or central in U.S. society.
- b. There is a proponent commitment to social justice.
- c. The dominant ideology should be challenged.
- d. Experiential knowledge is emphasized via storytelling.
- e. Interdisciplinary approaches are important.

All of these common tenets were important to this study. The following paragraphs explicate the tenets that guided the study.

The first of these tenets is that race and racism are endemic or central in U.S. society. The use of race in society is ever present. Gatherers of national statistics through various instruments utilize race to delineate populations. These surveys include federal census, political polls, salary distributions, medical conditions, and educational levels, among others. Institutional racism has been identified by critical race scholars as the longstanding barrier to self determination by racial minority groups (Barnes, 1990). Omi and Winant (1994) discussed racial formation theory as the creation of privilege for one group to the exclusion and deprivation of others where one group has and exercises the power to discriminate. It is out of these circumstances that racism arises. In order for the dominant group to perpetuate and enjoy their privilege, they must justify the hegemonic system as it exists. It is this justification that keeps race at the center of U.S. society and constitutes racism.



The centrality of race and racism as a tenet of CRT is also supported by Crenshaw (1988), who noted that race consciousness is central to the dominance of Whites over African Americans and other people of color by creating the “other” as a social group. African Americans and other people of color thus become the focus of racial discrimination in the hegemonic society. When the “other” is actually visible through color of skin or other factors hegemony is easier to establish. The visible “other” also fosters the establishment of a pseudo-bond between the elite Whites and lower class Whites. This pseudo-bond serves to keep the lower class Whites satisfied by enabling them to focus their distastes on the “other”. Bell (1987) supported Crenshaw’s view as he addresses the issue of African Americans as the “other”. Bell discussed the enslavement of Africans and African Americans by wealthy Whites as a means for poor Whites to feel uplifted and to keep them satisfied. If lower class Whites focused their attention on degrading the “other,” they would not have time to think about how they themselves are deprived relative to the White elite. The establishment of the “other” paradigm kept race at the center of American societal structure and brought about situations within the legal and educational systems that were premised on racial characterizations. These characterizations included genetic, biological and cultural bases and proved to be detrimental to African Americans and other people of color.

With the label of “other,” African Americans were also cast as genetically and biologically inferior to Whites. However, Sowell (1984) indicated that the stereotype of African Americans is not based on genetics or biology, but rather on culture. The cultural inferiority of African Americans is viewed as the source of attributes such as laziness,

shiftlessness, criminality, ignorance and immorality, which rightfully places them subordinate to Whites. There has even been scientific research conducted to validate the idea of African American inferiority to Whites. Kamin (1974), Hilliard (1979), and Madaus (1994) each conducted research centered on the intelligence and academic achievement of African Americans and other people of color. They claim to have demonstrated the inferiority of these groups. The focus of this type of research is referred to as the inferiority paradigm. Whether for biological or cultural reasons, the African American and other people of color are deemed inferior and therefore should be subordinate to Whites.

This paradigm also carries over into the educational system. Solórzano and Yosso (2001) spoke specifically to racism in the U.S. educational system, indicating that the system is influenced by stereotypes in forming its opinions and expectations of African Americans and other students of color. These stereotypes are perpetuated via the news and entertainment media and can be placed into three basic categories: intelligence/educational, personality/character and physical appearance. Within the intelligence/educational category, African Americans are seen as stupid, Chicanas/os as dumb and Native Americans as slow. Similarly, for the personality/character category, African Americans are viewed as violent, Chicanas/os as lazy and Native Americans as savage. Thomas (2007) noted that the aggressive violent stereotype of African American males is pervasive in American society and is fueled by those claiming a biological basis for this designation. Smith, Allen and Danley (2007) addressed the stereotyping of African American males as violent and found that these students attending PWI's experienced heightened surveillance and local policing

on and off campus. In the third category of physical appearance, African Americans are deemed unclean, Chicanas/os as dirty and Native Americans as scary. Based on these negative stereotypes, the educational system establishes policies and expectations for these groups that are lower than those for Whites and Asian Americans.

There are other authors who offer additional insight as an explanation for the racist nature of the educational system. The curriculum in the U.S. educational system is structured such that it distorts the experiences of African American and other students of color (Yosso, 2002). Wells and Serna (1996) also indicated that the experiences of students of color are discounted and the schools cater to upper middle class White experiences. Delgado Bernal (2001) concurs and proposed that Critical Race Theory challenge the educational discourses that discount learning experiences of the home and community of racial minorities. The curriculum structure determines what courses will be offered to present specific knowledge.

Additionally, there is discourse that determines which students will be exposed to certain knowledge while others will not. For example, enrollment into Advanced Placement courses, college preparatory programs, honors courses and other such courses and programs for those students designated by the system as intellectually gifted tend to exclude students of color. The discourse that establishes the White middle class as the standard supports the mechanism of access to these advanced programs and courses. In the meantime, the traditional curriculum tends to under prepare students of color to access these advanced programs (Valencia, 2002).

Tracking is another example of an educational process that keeps many students of color from benefiting from courses that would better prepare them to access higher education. Yosso (2002) noted that Chicana/o students constituted the majority of those who were tracked into vocational and other terminal programs, and that this reveals racialized inequality of the traditional curriculum. As a result, the student of color graduates from high school underprepared to pursue higher education opportunities. Some do enroll in local community colleges, but spend one to two years in remedial courses which do not earn credits toward a degree or transfer to a four-year institution. Yosso asserted that the racist structures and processes within K-12 education continue through higher education. This means that when these students of color enter the community college system, they are subject to the same or similar treatment as they were in the public school system. This would certainly hold true if the same White middle class standard is considered the norm. African Americans and other students of color would then be held to this standard that continues to distort and disavow their experiences. Tate (1997) urged educators to ask how the structures and processes in education born of racism impede the educational progress of students of color. For example, he contended that intelligence testing serves to create a symbolic mode for the affirmation of a belief system that justifies and motivates political action. The belief system characterizes people of color as biologically and genetically inferior to Whites and, therefore suggests that they have limited capability for achievement in life. According to Tate, there exists a relationship between the construction of education related policy and law and the assumptions of intellectual inferiority of people of color.

The second tenet of Critical Race Theory that guided my study is storytelling (sharing experiential knowledge) among people of color. Critical race theorists believe that it is important for people of color to tell their stories because throughout the history of the U.S. the experiences and culture of people of color have been suppressed. The most glaring example of this type of suppression is the treatment of African slaves brought to America to provide free labor. These slaves were stripped of their language and culture. They were taught that their worth was only in the labor they could provide. They were property to be bought and sold at the whim of White slave masters. The story told of a developing U.S. was one of White privilege and subordination of African and African American slaves. This dominant story helped Whites remind themselves of their superior identity over the slaves and other people of color. Delgado (1989) explained it using the ingroup vs. outgroup relationship. The story of the ingroup, Whites, perpetuated their superior status over outgroups, people of color, and provided for a pseudo shared relationship between the elite and lower class Whites. The perceived superiority of Whites from these stories was seen as natural.

Over the years, there have been some changes in the relationship between the ingroup and outgroups. Although the ingroup no longer has complete control over the lives of outgroups, the dominant stories have persisted as the appropriate description of the way things are and are meant to be. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) called these stories majoritarian stories. We have lived so long in this society by the stories of the White dominant culture that we use them to interpret our world (Delgado, 1989) and are persuaded that our society is as it

should be. Delgado indicates that these stories are the background for our country's legal and political discourse that has become invisible to the point that we consider our social arrangement fair and natural.

Critical Race Theory proposes that African Americans and other people of color tell their stories as a means to bring recognition to their lived experiences and dealings with racism in the U.S. These stories are told as personal stories (narratives) and counter-stories depicting the lived experiences of African Americans and other people of color as told from their perspective. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) defined personal stories as recounting the actual lived experiences of individuals with different forms of racism and sexism. Counter stories are defined as method of storytelling and can expose, analyze and challenge majoritarian stories of White privilege. Barnes (1990) stated that critical race theorists attempt to transform our racist society by bringing to bear the collective experiential knowledge of people of color as it is reflected in these personal stories and counter stories. By drawing out these narratives, critical race theorists give legitimacy and value to these narratives and counter the sense of devaluation that has been perpetuated by the dominant culture.

Delgado (1989) refers to the practice of telling personal stories and counter stories as naming one's own reality. He bases the telling of personal stories and counter stories on the premise that social reality is constructed. Therefore, as we communicate experiences through narratives we shape our reality. In the past, the reality of people of color has been shaped for them via the stories of the dominant culture. Telling personal stories and counter stories can

serve as a means for African Americans or other people of color to express lived experiences and shape their own reality.

Lived experiences told as personal stories provide a medium for people of color to affirm their experiences. According to Delgado Bernal (2002), these stories are testimonies, life histories or other types of narratives providing a different perspective from the story of the dominant culture. Delgado Bernal also indicated that researchers must learn to listen and hear the message of these personal stories. Within the personal story there is a message of the impact of racial discrimination on the lives of people of color. Delgado (1989) gave an example of how these stories are viewed in the legal system. If the story conforms to the style of legal discourse they become whitewashed and are seen by judges as insufficient to counter the dominant version of the story. If the story is too abrasive and too much of an affront, then people react negatively. The story should be non-coercive but invites the reader to listen for the message and then determine what truth is contained therein.

As the second type of narrative, counter stories can be created by using techniques described by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Delgado Bernal (1998). The Strauss and Corbin technique is called theoretical sensitivity and posits that it is a personal quality of the researcher (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This quality is one in which the researcher has some degree of sensitivity to the situation via personal experience and/or extensive reading. The Delgado Bernal technique is termed cultural intuition (Solórzano & Yosso) and posits that it is achieved via experience (personal or professional), literature, and the analytical process of research and analysis. Bell's works (1987, 1989, 1996, 1998) are examples of a scholar

drawing upon his experiences to create counter stories that convey a message depicted through fictional characters. He writes from his experiences as a civil rights attorney and from his extensive reading. Bell's stories are powerful, intriguing and thought provoking and drive home the message of the racism found in the U.S. They sarcastically portray the mindset of a racist society and accurately paint a picture of the struggles and suffering of African Americans in the U.S. These stories also offer some sensible and not so sensible solutions to the racism in American society, and challenge the status quo without being abrasive. They build consensus around the message the storyteller is attempting to convey.

The educational system, including higher education, can benefit from personal and counter stories of people of color. According to Ladson-Billings (1998), the commonalities of the stories of people of color give them voice. This voice is important to effect change in the educational system. Educational curriculum, instruction and assessment are based upon the majoritarian stories of a Eurocentric dominant culture. Programs to prepare teachers rely upon majoritarian stories for an explanation of educational inequity and depict students of color as culturally deprived (Kretovics & Nussel, 1994; Persell, 1977). The solution for the cultural deprivation of these students is cultural assimilation (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The argument for cultural assimilation is that students of color should assimilate to the dominant culture to be successful in school (Banfield, 1970; Berstein, 1977; Schwartz, 1971). The need for assimilation is taught in teacher education programs and is accomplished via the curriculum in our educational system. Thus, new teachers come into the system already equipped to reproduce a curriculum that perpetuates the existing inequities.



Assessment, according to Tate IV (1997) and Ladson-Billings (1998), is also based upon Eurocentric standards, usually suggesting that African American students are deficient. Since the standard by which all students are measured is White middle class and usually male, Crenshaw (1988) posited that the deficiency stereotype serves to support the hegemonic reality of White superiority and Black inferiority. Personal and counter stories open readers' minds to a different view of reality on curriculum, instruction and assessment.

Personal and counter stories are essential to understanding the lived experiences of African Americans and other people of color (Barnes, 1990; Bell, 1987, 1989, 1996, & 1998; Delgado, 1989; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solóranzo & Yosso, 2002). These narratives provide a mechanism for people of color to express their lot in U.S. society and provide critical race theorists a venue by which to analyze these experiences. Likewise, these stories are valuable for understanding and addressing the plight of students of color in the nation's educational system, and for examining the impact the racist educational system has upon students of color, and can serve as a base for influencing positive change (Crenshaw, 1988; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

The third tenet of critical race theory that guided my research study is that dominant ideology should be challenged. Freeman (1978) stated that the use of legal ideology and discourse are approaches to critically challenge dominant ideology. Freeman's premise for his suggestion was that the dominant ideology and societal system are legitimized by legal discourse. Gabel and Kennedy (1984) posited that dominant ideology must be exposed for what it is and how it perpetuates the superiority of the dominant culture. Gordon (1987)

proposed that ideology is to be unearthed so that it reveals the true nature of people who justify and rationalize their actions rather than objectively determining social relations as legal discourse espouses.

Crenshaw (1988) further expounded on the issue by indicating that critical race scholars all agree that the exposure of ideology is the logical first step for social transformation. Exposure can only come via challenging or critically engaging the ideology. Solórzano and Yosso (2001) defined this tenet as an examination of the educational system as a purveyor of societal inequality. Critical Race Theory challenges the notions of neutrality, objectivity and meritocracy within the education system. Although the dominant culture posits a neutral and objective educational system, the standard by which all students are measured is a White middle class standard. This standard is Eurocentric in nature, as noted by Padilla and Lindholm (1995). The challenge to this dominant ideology manifests itself in the establishment and recognition of different ways of knowing. These different ways of knowing are culturally based according to Delgado Bernal (2002). The educational system must recognize the value in the knowledge and ways of teaching and learning of people of color.

The fourth tenet of CRT is the commitment to social justice. Critical Race Theory did not develop overnight, but rather gradually grew out of a need to address societal forces that perpetuated racism although they espoused equality and the elimination of racism (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993). That need is at the core of the tenet regarding commitment to social justice. Critical race theorists believed that the civil rights

movement and subsequent civil rights laws did not serve to bring about social justice for oppressed people, especially African Americans. Rather, the liberal legal practices derived from the movement perpetuated a very slow remedy to obtain civil rights for people of color and continued to benefit Whites (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

The elimination of racial oppression is a part of the overall effort to eradicate oppression of all types. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2001) the commitment to social justice is anchored in a vision of “a social justice research agenda that leads toward the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty, and the empowering of underrepresented minority groups” (pg. 2). Oppression via racism is experienced by many concurrently with gender, class and sexual orientation oppression (Matsuda et al.). Critical Race Theory seeks to transform societal institutions to bring about social justice for all oppressed groups. All CRT scholars are unified around two common interests: “to understand how a ‘regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America’ and to change the bond that exists between law and racial power” (Ladson-Billings, 1998; pg 12).

The fifth and final tenet of CRT is that an interdisciplinary approach is important. At its inception CRT borrowed from other disciplines or traditions, including liberalism, Marxism, critical legal studies, feminism, postmodernism, and the law and society movement (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993). Traditionally critical race theorists analyze race by employing these various traditions’ methodology to expose the voice of the oppressed and advance the cause of racial and social justice. The interdisciplinary approach

also allows the analysis of race and racism in historical and contemporary contexts (Solórzano and Yosso, 2001). This type of analysis is in stark contrast to the traditional ahistorical and unidisciplinary methods of analysis.

Are there studies that examined the experiences of African American students and African American male students in the educational system using Critical Race Theory as a framework? The remaining paragraphs review empirical research that uses Critical Race Theory tenets to explore racism in education.

The discussion begins with studies of the early education of African American students. It is important to examine this topic in order to understand the issues relative to African American male academic achievement and persistence in higher education. One study that examined the academic achievement of African American youth is Spradlin, Welsh, and Hinson (2000). Their study is based upon the theory of Ogbu (1990) regarding voluntary and involuntary minorities. Ogbu posited that voluntary minorities were those whose ancestors came to America in search of a better life; involuntary minorities were those whose ancestors were slaves or were colonized. The voluntary minority has a distinct cultural frame of reference established before becoming a minority, and is not threatened by learning the culture and language of the dominant society. The involuntary minority, on the other hand, develops a cultural frame of reference after becoming a minority. The African American, an involuntary minority, developed coping skills upon which community norms, values and collective competence were based. For the involuntary minority, the cultural differences developed within their communities are viewed as boundaries that differentiate

them from those of the dominant culture. Learning and practicing various aspects of the dominant culture is seen as threatening to their culture, and those who cross cultural boundaries are labeled and often alienated. Part of these community values, particularly with males, is to reject the dominant culture's idea of academic success as one of the pathways to success in life. Ogbu also posited that a part of the rejection of dominant culture is the mindset that to achieve academically is "acting White" (p. 53). Similarly, Brookover, Flood, Schweitzer and Wisenbaker (1979) posited that academic futility, involuntary minority group membership, and depressed academic achievement were related.

Spradlin, Welsh, and Hinson (2000) sampled 185 students from four public schools in a southeastern US school district. Variables were GPA, academic self-concept, achievement salience, Ogbu Factor (collective factors for involuntary minority status), academic futility, and racial identity. The study showed that the average GPA of African American students was lower than that of White students. The study also discovered differences by gender for African American students. African American males had the highest levels of academic futility, racial identity and Ogbu Factor while also having the lowest GPAs. African American females had high levels of racial identity and Ogbu Factor, yet their GPAs were consistent with their White counterparts. The authors explained this difference between African American male and female performance as related to the lower levels of academic futility exhibited by African American females. While African American males feel strongly that the system is stacked against them, African American females feel this to a much lesser

degree. This study suggests that race and the effects of racism in the educational system can foster academic underachievement among African American males.

Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, and Harpalani (2001) challenge the Ogbu (1990) theory of “acting White.” In a study of sixth, seventh and eighth graders in a metropolitan southeastern US city, Spencer et al. found that the “acting White” phenomenon is complex contextually and therefore requires complex interpretation by adolescent youth. All youth, including African American youth, often show superficial identification with certain cultures, including their culture of origin. With the combination of the complex concept of “acting White” and the superficial racial identification of many African American youths, Spencer and his colleagues posited that the consequences of racial identity and “acting White” on academic performance would be difficult to predict. Spencer et al. also indicated that the theories of Ogbu (1990) and Brookover et al. (1979) were lacking in scholarship on racial stereotyping and coping strategies and that they provided too simplistic an explanation for the academic underachievement of African American students. Further, other studies examined the influence of parental involvement on the educational attitudes of African American male students. Hrabowski, Matson and Greif (1998) found that positive parental academic engagement during the child’s formative years was a significant factor influencing the attitudes of African American males towards education. This positive influence affords these youths an opportunity to develop a positive self-concept which is essential to the academic success of African American males according to Swanson, Cunningham and Spencer (2003).

Although some researchers discredit the “acting White” phenomenon, there is evidence of race as a factor in the early education of African American male students. Davis (2003) examined the experiences of African American male students in kindergarten through third grade. Davis found that African American males are disadvantaged and misunderstood relative to the interaction of race and gender. There are several negative consequences for being African American and male according to Davis. They are (1) school failure, (2) special education assignment, (3) suspensions, (4) expulsion, and (5) violence. African American boys are treated differently in school as early as kindergarten. Throughout primary and middle school African American boys receive low ratings from teachers for social behavior and academic expectation. The educational system is seen as not meeting the social and developmental needs of African American males; therefore, gender exclusive schools are suggested because it is thought that African American males see most educational activities as feminine and irrelevant to masculine identity and development. Davis also posited that teachers impose a feminine culture on males that trigger opposition.

Another school of thought points to the constant negative images of African American males in the media. Images of violent, hypersexual, disrespectful, unintelligent, and threatening males carry over into the schools and influence the African American male school experience. Davis (2003) concluded that student attitudes, the social organization of schools, and masculine identity explain the performance of African American males in early grades. The attitude is learned and reinforced by the media and the community. Oliver (2003) argued that, “...the media, (and particularly the news media) plays an important role

in the stereotyping of Black men as violent and dangerous” (p. 3). The social organization as it relates to African American boys revolves around curriculum issues, teaching strategies, school achievement climate and expectations. Related to these issues are underfunded schools which may have a particularly negative affect on African American boys. All of these issues relate to race.

Jenkins (2006) concurred with Davis on the issue of negative images of African American males in the media, reporting that society continues to project even bombard us with negative images of African American men and the positive image of White socialization. He goes even further to indicate that this pro-White socialization is disseminated in every aspect of our society--the school system, mass media, and religious institutions. Jenkins further posited that this negative assassination of the African American male has contributed to the lack of a strong sense of self-efficacy among these men.

Many teachers hesitate to engage and interact with African American boys in a close nurturing way and fail to provide necessary education services, noted Jenkins (2006), who indicated that African American boys are not provided an adequate education in the early childhood schooling. He reviewed data from a study in New Orleans showing that 40 percent of African American male students felt teachers did not set high enough goals for them and 60 percent wanted teachers to push them harder. Jenkins’ argument raises the question as to whether race and racism are at work in the educational system as it negatively impacts African American youth.



One empirical study exposing racism in public schools was conducted by Duncan (2002), who crafted an ethnographic study of marginalization and exclusion of African American male students in high school. The high school was located in a mid-sized metropolitan city in the Midwest of the U.S. The study was conducted over a two-year period and sought to uncover the reasons for attrition or retention of African American male students. He demonstrated the marginalization and exclusion of African American male students based on comments by other students and researcher observations. Also casual comments from teachers and other students evidenced their “don’t care” attitude toward African American male students. Duncan cited, as an example, a casual conversation with a teacher who stated “...if I saw an African American male who had to duck when he entered my class, I just said ‘oh, no’—he didn’t have a chance in my class” (p. 136). She was equating height with being a member of the basketball team, coupled with her notion that African American student athletes cannot succeed academically. As such, this evidence supports the tenet CRT that racism is a deeply embedded part of our educational system.

Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) examined a concept called racial microaggressions, as experienced by African American college students. Racial microaggressions are defined as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are put downs of blacks by offenders (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1978, p. 66). Although this study did not focus on African American males specifically, it is a powerful example of the racial climate on many college campuses. This study also demonstrated how campus climate impacts African American students.

The theoretical lens for the study was Critical Race Theory. Specifically Solórzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000) were seeking to answer (1) how do African American college students experience racial microaggressions?; (2) what impact do these racial microaggressions have on African American students?; (3) how do African American students respond to racial microaggressions?; and (4) how do racial microaggressions affect the collegiate climate? The study design was qualitative utilizing focus group guided discussions. This process allows participants to share their viewpoints on experiences of racial incidents on their campuses.

Three elite predominantly White, Research I universities were used in the study. Thirty four African American students, eighteen female and sixteen male, were interviewed. The findings indicated that racial microaggressions occur regularly on these campuses. They occur as low expectations by faculty, segregation of Whites when forming study groups, racist overtone comments by professors and double standards. The racial microaggressions occurred both inside and outside the classroom. Students expressed feelings of self-doubt, frustration, isolation, and distrust as a result of these experiences. Students also indicated that the microaggressions negatively impacted academic performance. Some students were frustrated to the point of transferring to a historically Black university.

Singer (2005) conducted a study as a part of a larger study designed to understand developmental issues facing African American male student athletes at predominantly White institutions. He specifically targeted African American football athletes seeking to understand how these men perceive racism at their institution. The theoretical lens utilized

for the study was Critical Race Theory. Singer learned, via focused group interview and individual in-depth interviews, that these African American football athletes did perceive racism on their campus. The stories of the athletes revealed racism in educational extracurricular activities as well as in the academic setting. During the focused group interview, one of the athletes spoke of how African American team members were never given the opportunity to serve in the leadership role of quarterback on the playing field. The athletes also saw racism and a lack of genuine care for them with regard to their academic advising. They described a “don’t care” attitude from counselors who advised the athletes to take almost anything just to get the credit hours, and observed preferential treatment for the White athletes who were advised to take certain courses they needed. This study revealed various detrimental themes including a lack of opportunity for participation in leadership positions by African American male athletes and differential treatment regarding academic advisement.

Critical Race Theory is derived from racial formation theory and is composed of five basic tenets. These tenets are (a) race and racism are endemic or central in U.S. society, (b) there is a proponent commitment to social justice, (c) the dominant ideology should be challenged, (d) experiential knowledge is emphasized via storytelling, and (e) interdisciplinary approaches are important. The object of critical race theorists is to address social injustices by exposing institutional differential treatment perpetuated through subtle, almost undetectable occurrences, policies and practices. Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman are credited with initiating Critical Race Theory in the 1970s. Studies of the public educational

system have been conducted and have exposed the effects of racism on the educational experiences of students of color (Davis, 2003; Duncan, 2002; Jenkins, 2006; Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Singer, 2005; Spradlin, Welsh & Hinson, 2000).

### **Chapter Summary**

Student involvement (Berger & Milem, 1999; Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2000; Hoffman et al., 2003) is a significant factor impacting student persistence. Learning communities have proven to be an important part of student involvement both in four-year institutions and community colleges. These were found to precipitate the development of peer support, student-faculty relationships and classroom comfort, all of which have been shown to positively impact persistence (Tinto, 1993; Tinto, Goodsell & Russo, 1993; Tinto, 1997). Other factors impacting student persistence generally in a negative direction, and particularly in community colleges, include student characteristics (Choy, 2002; Schmid & Bell, 2003), biculturalism and dual socialization (Hurtado, 1997; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000; Zambrana, 1998), financial difficulties (Braxton, Hirsch & McClendon, 2004) and racial discrimination (Eimers & Pike, 1997; Feagin, 1992; Solorzáno, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Suárez-Balcázar et al., 2003). Validation from a significant other helps enhance performance and ultimately persistence, for racial minority students (Rendon, 1994; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). African American students suffer racial discrimination at greater levels than other racial groups (Eimers & Pike, 1997; Suárez-Balcázar et al. 2003; Wyatt, 1997), with the African American male suffering the most. Factors that tend to enhance persistence of African American male students are having clear academic goals, recognizing the utility of

education for future opportunities and special institutional programs that meet identified needs (Fries-Britt, 1997; Glenn, 2003; Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2001; LaVant, Andeson & Tiggs, 1997; Mason, 1998; Spradlin, Welsh & Hinson, 2000).

When considering persistence it is also important to examine the impact of institutional characteristics' on student persistence. These characteristics constitute what the literature terms organizational culture. The organizational culture reflects "what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it" (Tierney, 1988; pg. 3). Organizational culture does impact persistence both positively and negatively. As open systems, higher education institutions reflect environmental influences in their policies and practices (Scott, 1987). These policies and practices become the culture of the institution. The culture of the institution helps students make meaning of their experiences, and the size and organizational behavior set the cultural environment of the institution (Kuh, 2001). Smaller institutions may have an overarching institutional culture with strong traditions and rituals that largely impact student persistence. Conversely, larger institutions may have many subcultures that may have more of an impact on persistence. Organizational behavior is used by Berger (2000) in reference to organizational culture. Organizational behavior does impact student persistence, such that institutions exhibiting competitive behavior have the most negative influence on student persistence and those exhibiting cohesive behavior have the most positive influence on student persistence (Berger, 2001). The literature also indicates that specifically for community colleges, institutional characteristics have less of an influence on persistence than do student characteristics (Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Kienzl & Leinback, 2005).

The conceptual framework of a large majority of college student persistence studies has been Tinto's (1975) interactionist theory of student departure. One particular conceptual framework that uses a different view is Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is derived from racial formation theory as posited by Omi and Winant (1994). There are five basic tenets of CRT: (1) race and racism are endemic or central in U.S. society; (2) there is proponent commitment to social justice; (3) the dominant ideology should be challenged; (4) experiential knowledge is emphasized; and (5) interdisciplinary approaches are important (Bell, 1997, 1989, 1993, 1996; Crenshaw, 1988, 1993, 1995; Delgado, 1989, 1990; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Tate, 1997; Yosso, 2002). Critical race theory is useful in the research of educational experiences of racial minority students in the educational system since it reveals issues of racism and educational standards based on a Eurocentric culture (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso; Tate, 1997; Wells & Serna, 1996; Valencia, 2002; Yosso, 2002). Race and racism have been suggested to foster academic underachievement in African American male students in a southeastern U.S. school district (Spradlin, Welsh & Hinson, 2000). Other studies have also demonstrated negative academic consequences for African American male students within the public school system in the U.S. (Davis, 2003; Duncan, 2002; Jenkins, 2006). Negative consequences for African American students generally and African American male students specifically have also been demonstrated in the nation's colleges and universities (Singer, 2005; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000).

This study sought to examine the experiences of African American males in community colleges, and how these experiences impact persistence. Using Critical Race Theory as a theoretical lens, storytelling was encouraged as a means to learn about and understand the experiences of these students. The personal stories of African American male students in community colleges can provide a window into lived experiences that otherwise may never be heard. These narratives provided the valuable insights for initiating positive policy changes that could dramatically improve the persistence of African American male students in the community college setting. Also, Critical Race Theory was employed to offer challenges to any dominant ideological thoughts, as reported by the study participants, which might have existed in these institutions. Additionally CRT provided a venue for the promotion of social justice relative to any injustices discovered as a result of this study. An interdisciplinary approach was not purposely employed although a brief description was included in the literature review, and gender as well as historical and contemporary contexts were considered in the design of the study as well analysis of the findings. Finally, commitment to social justice is discussed in the Implications for Theory section of Chapter Five.

The next chapter addresses the methodology that was employed to study the experiences of African American male students in community colleges. Chapter Three outlines the rationale for employing the qualitative paradigm, narrative inquiry approach, sampling procedures, data collection, analysis, and study limitations. Chapter Three also addresses researcher subjectivity, and steps for verification of trustworthiness of the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of African American male students in community colleges and to explore their decision to persist. This qualitative study also sought to describe these experiences and to discover any impact these experiences might have on their decisions regarding completing a degree. The study was guided by four overarching research questions:

1. What are the experiences of African American male students in community college?
2. How do personal, social and environmental factors affect the persistence of African American male students in community college?
3. What enhances the semester to semester persistence of African American male students in community college?
4. What detracts from the semester to semester persistence of African American male students in community college?

This chapter outlines the overall methodology of the study by describing the research design, sample selection, and data analysis. Additionally, the chapter outlines the study's veracity and trustworthiness, researcher subjectivity, and limitations. The chapter closes with a brief summary.

#### **Design of the Study**

Through qualitative research the underlying causes of human action may be discovered and revealed. Such research provides for the human side of a phenomenon to be



shared when the goal is to attempt to understand experiences from the perspective of the one living them (Schwandt, 1994). This goal may be achieved through the creation of interaction between researcher and the researched, with the assumption that knowledge as meaning is created contextually (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). Context is important to how humans make meaning of their experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2006); therefore, qualitative research relies heavily upon context with studies conducted in the natural setting of the participants. Because I, as the researcher, sought to understand how the experiences of African American male students in community college impacted their decisions to persist, a qualitative research design was employed as the appropriate research mode for the study.

According to Turner and Bruner (1986), in many cultures stories are predominant in organizing and articulating experiences. Critical Race Theory was the initial conceptual framework guiding this study; therefore, lived experiences of the racial minority group-- African American male students in community college--were examined through their stories. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), these stories are usually known as counter stories. Counter stories depict the lived experiences of people of color as told from their perspective and tend to expose, analyze and challenge stories of White privilege. These counter stories are also referred to as narratives. Research utilizing the analysis of narratives as told or written by participants to explore their lived experiences is referred to as narrative inquiry. Polkinghorne (1988) posited, "Narrative is the fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite...a

meaning structure that organizes events and human actions into a whole thereby attributing significance to individual actions and events according to their effect on the whole” (pp. 13-14). In other words, we attach significance to human actions and events by linking them in an organized story or narrative. We thereby give them meaning. Kerby (1991) took it a step further when writing, “narratives are a primary embodiment of our understanding of the world of experience and ultimately of ourselves” (p. 3). Our way of knowing is through the narratives we hear and tell as we give meaning to our lived experiences.

This study gave voice to the African American male community college student. Giving voice to the participants via their counter stories provided a means for them to name their own reality, as Delgado suggested (1989). These students gave accounts of their experiences in the community college setting and described the influence those experiences had on their persistence decisions. Narrative inquiry provided a means for these students’ stories to be heard and for me to explore the lived experiences of African American male students in community colleges.

### **Sample Selection**

Qualitative research quite often employs purposive sampling in selecting research sites and participants. Patton (2002) gave guidelines for purposive sampling and suggested that its usefulness is to ensure that the sample is information rich. Purposive sampling is defined as a process of “selecting participants who will serve a specific purpose consistent with a study’s main objective” (Collingridge & Grantt, 2008, p.391). An example would be selecting participants who have experienced the phenomenon under study. Devers and

Frankel (2000) offered a more specific explanation, indicating that purposive sampling is designed to “enhance understandings of selected individuals or groups’ experiences or for developing theories and concepts” (p. 264). Researchers attempt to achieve this goal by selecting sites, participants or organizations that can provide the greatest insight into the research question.

### **Sampling Procedures**

Purposive sampling was utilized in this study. More specifically, a combined strategy of maximum variation, criterion, and convenience within purposive sampling were employed. Maximum variation sampling uses a significant range of individuals, groups or settings (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). It also provides for comparability as noted by Teddlie and Yu (2007). Maximum variation sampling was used in selecting the study settings in that a significant range of settings was sought to provide for comparability between institutions. The variations included:

- Location: institutions were urban, sub-urban, and rural
- Size: institutions were large, midsized, and small

Maximum variation was desired in this study for comparison of institutions by size. Kuh (2001) suggests that the size of the institution influences the degree of impact of the overall institutional culture on persistence.

Convenience sampling was the second type of sampling utilized in selecting the settings for the study. Merriam (2009) cited convenience sampling as a strategy for sample selection and included time, location and funding in her definition of convenience sampling.

For the purpose of this study, the convenience aspect of the sample selection involved the selection of community colleges that were within one hour driving distance of the researcher's home base. Colleges within the specified driving distance provided easier and quicker access to participant pools and reduced expenses for the researcher.

Criterion sampling was used to select the participants for the study. Criterion sampling as defined by Patton (1990) is selecting settings and/or participants based upon their meeting some criterion. Participants in this study were selected based upon criteria established according to the phenomenon under study. There were four essential criteria for participant selection:

- Race: participant is African American
- Gender: participant is male
- Enrollment: participant is enrolled in a community college degree program
- Experience: participant has completed one semester with a minimum of six credit hours

The first two criteria were applicable because the focus of the study was the African American male student. As noted by Collingridge and Grantt (2008), participants are to be selected to facilitate meeting the main objective of the study. It was necessary to secure African American male students for the express purpose of studying their experiences in community college. The third criterion of being enrolled in a community college degree program was necessary because generally the research on African American male students relative to persistence has been conducted utilizing degree seeking students. This study

sought to parallel those works utilizing degree seeking students. The fourth criterion of having completed one semester with a minimum of six credit hours was to ensure that the participants were not first semester freshmen lacking experience in the college setting to share for the purpose of data collection.

An introductory letter was mailed to the president of each community college providing a brief background of the researcher, an overview of the proposed research study and a request for permission to conduct research on their respective campuses. The letter also requested the names and contact information for one or two gatekeepers within the institution who could direct me to potential participants (Appendix A). With permission to conduct the study and the names of gatekeepers secured, I spoke via telephone with the gatekeepers, oriented them on the study and asked them to identify potential participants for me to meet. Gatekeepers at each college identified potential participants based upon the predetermined criteria. I met with each potential participant group and, from those meetings, the fourteen study participants were selected. Participants were provided an Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) explaining the study and their role should they chose to become involved. Participants understood that their involvement in the study was strictly voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point if they so desired.

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative research involves the study of a subject matter using a naturalistic approach, the researcher as an instrument of data collection, and an interpretive process by the researcher to understand the meaning of some lived experience (Creswell, 1998). The

objective is to gather data in the context in which the participants interact and live relative to the phenomenon under investigation. Participants are most likely to be themselves in the natural setting, thus giving a truer representation of what takes place on a daily basis. Research data in this study were gathered via participant demographic forms, semi-structured interviews, observations and document review. All data collection was conducted on the campuses of the three community colleges participating in the study, thereby providing the appropriate context for which to study the phenomenon. Time with participants, including interviews, phone calls and observations, expanded a period of five months from July through November 2010.

### **In-depth Semi-structured Interviews**

The focus of the qualitative interview varies from very broad for researching life stories to very narrow when seeking to understand a participant's point of view on a particular situation (Berry, 1999). This study sought to understand broadly how the participants make meaning of their experiences at community colleges. Marshall and Rossman (2006) wrote that, "the participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it" (p. 101). To gain participants' perspective and to understand the lived experiences of individuals in this study the in-depth semi-structured interview was used.

The semi-structured interview allows the researcher to obtain pertinent information on the subject while facilitating flexibility for participants to freely tell their story (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). An interview guide was used for the interviews

(Appendix D). Short open-ended questions were used as prompts for the participant to begin sharing community college experiences. Although the interview was guided, probing questions were asked as appropriate for elaboration on certain issues and experiences. The interviews were conversational in nature, as suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2006), yet guided by me, the researcher. Interviews lasted for approximately one hour. Each participant was given a pseudonym for purposes of confidentiality. All interviews were conducted on the campuses of the participants, providing the natural setting in which qualitative research is done. No second face-to-face interviews were scheduled, but there were several telephone conversations with participants for the purpose of clarification. Interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed. Data were stored securely at the researcher's home office and were maintained for the duration of the study. Participants were provided a copy of their transcribed interviews to review for accuracy (member check).

### **Researcher Observations**

Observation involves the systematic recording of “events, behaviors and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 98). More specifically, the observation facilitates the recognition of complex interactions in the social setting (Marshall & Rossman). The participant observations were to document these students in their natural setting at the community college as they interact with the environment. Participants were observed on campus outside of the classroom interacting with other students, faculty and staff.

My role as researcher was the peripheral membership role. The peripheral membership role as described by Adler and Adler (1994) is one in which the researcher “interacts enough with the members to establish insider identity without participating” (p.380). Although in the peripheral membership role, my interaction with the participants during observation was somewhat limited but sufficient for them to feel comfortable behaving naturally within the college setting. Field notes of observations were kept as suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2006). An example of the field note form is found in Appendix E. These observations chronicled the students as they experienced the community college.

### **Document Examination**

The context of the setting as well as a historical perspective is obtained through an examination of documents (Hodder, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This data collection strategy supplemented interviewing and participant observation. Policies and administrative procedures that specifically addressed student success and diversity were examined. Documents included those found on the colleges’ websites as well as printed documents. Program brochures, student handbooks, diversity policies, and college catalogs were among documents reviewed in this study. Student body demographic information relative to age, gender and race/ethnicity was examined as well. Completed participant demographic forms (Appendix B) were included in document examination. The information requested on these forms included age, marital and employment status, number of dependent children, program of study, number of credit hours earned, and extracurricular campus activities of each



participant. This information assisted in constructing participant narratives and understanding the perspective of each participant as he shared his community college experiences. Document examination was guided by a Document Analysis Guide (Appendix F).

The use of these additional methods of data collection may provide different perspectives on the topic. According to Rossman and Wilson (1994), the use of data from different sources can corroborate and expand explanations of the research question. This method of using additional sources of data collection is termed triangulation. Triangulation helps provide validity to the study as it is “the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 202).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis, according to Huberman and Miles (1994), consists of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction occurs during the research design process when choosing a conceptual framework, research questions, setting, participants and instruments. Data display involves the organization of data in a manner such that conclusions may be drawn, and conclusion drawing/verification involves the researcher making meaning of the organized data. Data analysis as defined by Marshall and Rossman (2006) is the establishment of “order, structure, and interpretation to a mass of collected data” (p. 154). The process often incorporates three distinct activities of description, analysis and interpretation, which combine to form what researchers generally call analysis. Generally, in qualitative research data collection and analysis occur simultaneously and

continuously. As data are collected and analyzed, various unanticipated categories and themes may emerge. The emerging themes result from the extended period of time during which the researcher reads and rereads field notes, interview transcripts, documents and other data and becomes intimately familiar with the data.

Interviews conducted with participants produced a narrative or story of their experiences in the community college. However, their narratives extended beyond their experiences in the community college and included their experiences as children in the public school system and with their families.

I, as the researcher, was the primary instrument of data collection, analysis and interpretation. Beyond research design, the process of analysis resumed with the interviews and continued with the transcription of the participant interviews, the formation of study conclusions, implications and recommendations. Because the interviews produced narratives of the lived experiences of the participants, the appropriate method of analysis for this study was narrative analysis. During the transcription process, the data were examined for key words that related specifically to CRT and student persistence theory. By transcribing the interviews, I became very familiar with the stories of the participants.

The participants' narratives were initially analyzed in accordance with Coffey and Atkinson's (1996) and Czarniawska's (2004) suggestions for examining how they were organized and developed as well the components of the narratives. The people in their stories, words they used to describe experiences and how they resolved issues were examined, and things that were not included were noted as well. Settings in which various

incidents occurred were noted. The aforementioned analysis was done in conjunction with transcript review for big ideas (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008) in terms of what the narratives were saying. Transcripts were reread to further sort the data into categories. Notes were jotted in the margins and, during rereads of the transcripts, key words and phrases were highlighted. Lists of codes and assigned words and phrases from the narratives were created that served as an initial arrangement of ideas based upon conceptual framework categories. These initial categories consisted of common patterns related to the conceptual framework, but also patterns that constituted ideas that were consistent with student persistence theory. The latter categories resulted from open coding that was done concurrently with conceptual coding. The data were continually questioned to further categorize and code the information according to the conceptual framework.

Theme development consisted of immersion in the data noting recurring words and phrases and further scrutinizing words and phrases coded into conceptual categories. Comparisons across narratives were performed noting salient words, phrases and ideas that constituted common themes. Transcripts were reviewed several times more to search for other phrases, nuances and subthemes. Several copies of words and phrases were made and color coded according to concept codes. Additionally, summaries of document reviews and observations were examined for correlation with information from participant narratives. This process resulted in the establishment of final categories, themes and subthemes from participant narratives, observations and document review.

## **Data Display**

The stories told by the participants emerged from the data collection process. Additionally, notes were taken from the observations and document review. The stories were recorded digitally and transcribed for the purpose of analysis. Themes were identified and coded as they emerged via the process of analysis. Participant demographic data as well as themes and subthemes were summarized in matrices (Tables 1 & 2 respectively).

## **Veracity, Trustworthiness and Subjectivity**

A key component of any research study is to ensure the validity of the findings. The assurance of the validity of the findings in this study is set forth in the following discussions of veracity, trustworthiness and researcher subjectivity.

### **Veracity and Trustworthiness**

One of the most important aspects of a qualitative study is proof or evidence of veracity and trustworthiness. Whether the findings and conclusions can be counted as valid is a question that must be consistently in the mind of the researcher from the beginning of the research project. A strategy must be developed to ensure that veracity, rigor and trustworthiness are substantiated. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended strategies to obtain trustworthiness, including peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, an audit trail, member checks and negative cases.

Several of these recommended strategies were employed in this study. In-depth interviews, observations and document review for data collection were the primary data collection methods. Employed together, these three methods constitute triangulation, which

is a well recognized method for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research. Member checks were also utilized with participants reviewing transcripts of their interviews for factual accuracy. Several debriefing sessions with my committee chair and my research methodologist were held to ensure that the appropriate methodology was being employed and that thorough reporting of study results was occurring. The debriefing sessions also served as encouragement for the researcher to consider other possibilities and alternatives while moving through the research process.

### **Researcher Subjectivity**

Addressing issues of researcher subjectivity is vitally important to any qualitative study. It is something that cannot be ignored according to Peshkin (1988). The researcher must recognize and acknowledge any areas of subjectivity, and continually refer to them when analyzing research data (Ahem, 1999). Additionally, the researcher must look specifically for potential areas of conflict and feelings that could jeopardize neutrality. Kramp (2004) described the bracketing interview that she used in her research as a tool to acknowledge her areas of subjectivity. The bracketing interview is accomplished by permitting a colleague to conduct an interview with the researcher to bring out biases and presuppositions the researcher might have relative to the research topic. Other researchers simply engage in critical self-reflection and record any biases and presuppositions in the research document (Johnson, 1997). The remaining paragraphs within this section contain the results of a critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding African American male

students in the American educational system and how the researcher monitored those biases and their effect upon data analysis.

The initial assumption I bring into the research study is that racism still exists in the U.S. and within the various institutional organizations in the U.S. I am an African American male who grew up in the Southeast U.S. and who is a product of the educational system within this geographical region. It is within this region and its educational system that I experienced some of my worst moments. I have experienced both subtle and blatant racism and discrimination generally from a societal perspective and within the educational system. General societal experiences included exposure to racial remarks, being under constant watch in retail stores, and receiving poor service among others. I also bring to the study the assumption that a significant percentage of White Americans are still of the mindset that African Americans and other racial minority groups are inferior to them and that these groups are less intelligent.

Further, as a college administrator, I bring to the study the assumption that the community college system is for many students, particularly racial minority students, the only opportunity to launch their higher education careers. Additionally, I assume that many of these students lack confidence in their academic abilities due to their experiences within the K-12 educational system and due to their socioeconomic standing. Finally, I assume that society, either directly or indirectly, has significantly influenced the attitudes and beliefs of minority students regarding their ability to perform academically.

Having acknowledged the aforementioned assumptions as biases and presuppositions that I bring to this study, I realized that I must constantly monitor these biases to prevent them from influencing decisions on data collection and interpretation that might jeopardize the trustworthiness of the data analysis process. I employed self-evaluation of my assumptions and biases during the research process and with interest and surprise noted no particular prejudiced feelings that appeared to jeopardize my neutrality in the interpretation of the data. I acknowledge that I experienced recollections of occurrences in my own life that were quite similar to those of some of the participants; however, these recollections did not in any way skew my interpretation of the stories told by participants. Notes from interviews, observations and document examination were made and reviewed. The specific strategy that I used is one suggested by Ahern (1999). I reflected on feelings that could have jeopardized my neutrality in the interpretation of data, and made reflective notes, identifying no feelings that impacted my neutrality as the researcher.

### **Delimitations/Limitations of the Study**

There were two delimitations within this study. First, the study was delimited to three local community colleges, thereby setting the study geographically in the southeastern region of the United States. This delimitation was established due to the intent of the study to investigate community college persistence specifically and for convenience of access to the setting and potential participants. Second, the study was delimited by participant type. Participant type was bounded by race, gender, enrollment status and community college

experience. Again, the intent of the study dictated participant type in that the focus of the study was the African American male degree seeking community college student.

The study was further limited by the number of participants. A larger participation pool would provide more stories with different perspectives that could result in more themes relative to experiences of African American male students in community colleges.

Additionally, this study did not include observations of participants in the classroom setting.

The study could have been enhanced if such observations were a part of the research effort.

The researcher would have been able to observe interactions of participants with faculty and other students which might have provided for more insight into the dynamics of the classroom experience.

Fourth, this study was limited by the lack of intentional use of all five tenets of CRT. Had the interdisciplinary approach been purposely employed, the research might have identified factors that linked race and socioeconomic status or race and sexual orientation to the experiences of African American males in community college.

In spite of the delimitations and limitations of the study the findings and conclusions may be transferable to some degree to African American male students in community colleges in other geographical locations in the U. S. Similarities in overall mission of community colleges nationwide and the issues faced by African American males in U.S. society might enhance transferability of findings in this study.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter Three set forth the overall design and methodology employed in this research study. The description of the methodology began with the outline of a literature-supported



sample selection process followed by an overview of the data collection process. The data collection methods included in-depth interviews, observations of the participants on their campuses, as well as document review. Data analysis involved the establishment of categories and themes based upon open coding and coding that is literature-based relative to the conceptual framework of the study and other applicable theories. The method of data analysis was narrative inquiry utilizing a constant comparative approach. This chapter also discussed strategies utilized for ensuring veracity and trustworthiness, and explained the researcher's subjectivity. The next chapter reports the findings of the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of African American male students in community colleges and to explore their decision to persist. This qualitative study also sought to describe these experiences and to discover any impact these experiences might have to their decisions regarding completing a degree. It was based upon the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of African American male students in community college?
2. How do personal, social and environmental factors affect the persistence of African American male students in community college?
3. What enhances the semester to semester persistence of African American male students in community college?
4. What detracts from the semester to semester persistence of African American male students in community college?

The chapter begins with a brief description of each college setting followed by a description of the participants in the study. The chapter then proceeds to present the findings in order of the aforementioned research questions. Finally the chapter ends with a brief summary.

## **Context and Demographics**

### **Setting**

The setting for this study was the campuses of three community colleges in a Southeastern state in the United States. All three colleges are public two-year institutions and have been assigned pseudonyms for the purpose of institutional anonymity. The colleges began as independent or satellite industrial centers as did most colleges within the state system. Most of these centers began in the 1960's and were chartered as member institutions in the state community college system in the 1970's and 1980's. The first institution, Urban Community College (UCC), is the largest of the three colleges in the study. Enrollment for the 2009-2010 academic year was nearly 60,000.

The student body demographics of UCC are diverse. During the 2009-2010 academic year 52 percent of the student body was Caucasian, 25 percent African American, 9 percent Hispanic, 5 percent Asian, 1 percent Native American, and 8 percent categorized as Other. The total number of female students outnumbered the total number of male students by 4 percent during the same period. The African American male student enrollment during the same period was 12 percent of the total student body. African American female students outnumbered African American male students by 22 percent. UCC is composed of one main campus and several satellite campuses offering an array of educational and training programs, both credit and non-credit.

The college's mission focuses on workforce training and meeting educational needs of adults within its service area. The college seeks to collaborate with a variety of entities

and organizations while remaining accountable and responsible as it strives to provide quality educational and community service opportunities.

The second institution, Suburban Community College (SCC), is a mid-sized college enrolling approximately 20,000 students during the 2009-2010 academic year. The college has a multi-county service area and offers educational credit and non-credit programs in each county.

During the 2009-2010 year, African American students comprised 22 percent of the total student body. Caucasians were 58 percent, Hispanics 13 percent, Asians and Native Americans 1 percent each and 5 percent designated as Other. The total female student population was 4 greater than the total male student population. The African American male enrollment for the same period was 12 percent of the total student body. African American female students outnumbered African American male students by 19 percent.

According to its mission, the college focuses on education and training for the purpose of community and economic development. Diversity is of vital importance as the college seeks to remain student centered. The college also seeks to be innovative while not sacrificing excellence and integrity.

The third institution, Rural Community College (RCC), is the smallest college of the three in the study. Its main campus is located near a small town in a rural, agricultural-based county within the state. RCC has one county as its service area and provides educational credit and non-credit programs on its main campus and a satellite center.

The college enrolled about 9,000 students in the 2009-2010 academic year.

Demographically, the student body is 54.5 percent Caucasian, 37 percent African American, 7 percent Hispanic and .5 percent each Asian, Native American and Other. Unlike the two other institutions in this study, the male student body was larger than the female one, with male students outnumbering female students by 2 percent. African American male students were 19 percent of the total student body; however, they were outnumbered by African American female students by 28 percent.

The mission of the college recognizes the diversity within its service area and stresses student career aspirations, academic attainment, and individual goals. The college holds that education should be accessible to all and that the institution must act responsibly to maintain integrity within the community which it serves. The college also strives to be influential in preparing a qualified workforce and be instrumental in community development.

### **Participants**

There were fourteen participants involved in this study. All were African American male students enrolled in a credit bearing degree program at a community college. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 66. Nine of these men were single, three were married, one divorced and one a widower. Five participants were from UCC, five from SCC, and four from RCC. Each participant was given a pseudonym for the purpose of confidentiality.

The number of credit hours completed, as reported by the participants, ranged from 10 to 66. Self reported Grade Point Averages (GPAs) for participants ranged from 2.0 to 3.95. Programs of study varied, with six participants enrolled in college transfer, two in computer technology, four in vocational/technical, and one each in Business Administration

and Early Childhood Education. Seven of the participants were members of a college sponsored minority male mentoring program, one participant was a member of the college basketball team, one a member of the Student Government Association (SGA), and five participants did not belong to any campus organizations. Following is a brief description of each participant.

**Aaron** is a 22-year-old native of the service area of SCC and the product of a very close knit family whose faith played an important role in his development. He is single and still lives with his parents. Aaron attended public schools in the area. At the end of his fourth grade year, the elementary school he was attending closed and Aaron moved to a new school. Middle school for him was uneventful, but high school was great and he graduated with a GPA between 3.2 and 4.0. When asked if he had any encounters during his early schooling that could be considered racial, he indicated he did not. Aaron said he is the type of person who is open minded relative to race and race relations. He stated:

I know...the history of my people, and I don't let that influence me a lot now. I have many diverse...many people of color...different races as my friends, and close friends, actually I trust them with my life. I mean, I understand the history and all, but overall I don't let that influence my mind.

In other words, Aaron seems to be saying that race doesn't play an important role in the way he thinks and perceives the world. He is very practical and analytical in his thinking and focuses on goals he has set for himself and little else matters.

Immediately after completing high school, he enrolled at SCC and completed a certificate and diploma program in automotive restoration. He decided not to attend a university because he knew he would succumb to the party scene and staying close to home was the best thing for him. After not finding suitable employment in the area for which he was trained he went to work for 3M and was there for three and a half years. He decided to return to Suburban and earn a two-year degree. Aaron is currently enrolled in the Industrial Engineering program, having earned 60 credit hours.

**Bill** is a 22-year-old single male who grew up in a single parent home in the same city in which UCC is located. He and his mother moved several times within the city. He remembered living in a poor apartment complex. The family's constant moving also meant that Bill changed schools often. The schools Bill attended were predominantly white but he experienced no adverse situations of significance in the city's public school system.

After high school Bill attended an automotive trade school but found it was not what he expected. He next applied to a historically black college (HBCU) within the state, but due to paperwork issues Bill was not able to enroll. He then decided to enroll in UCC. He is enrolled in the college transfer program and has earned 62 credit hours. Bill is employed approximately twenty hours per week while enrolled as a fulltime student in the college transfer program and has completed 62 credit hours.

**Darin is** a single 20-year-old attending UCC who grew up in a semi-rural community of the state. Both parents were in the home and the family moved to Urban City his tenth grade year. He remembered a difference in the academic atmosphere between the rural high

school and the urban high school. At the rural high school, academics seemed more important than at the urban high school from which he graduated. Darin didn't take his education very seriously until he found himself in jail twice shortly after his sixteenth birthday. Education was very important in his family, with his father and mother having earned college degrees. By the time he entered eleventh grade his grades were quite low and, in spite of a gargantuan effort, he could not pull up his GPA enough to enroll in a university.

Darin opted to attend a community college due to his low GPA. He intends to build a good GPA and transfer to a four-year institution. Darin is currently enrolled as a fulltime student in the college transfer program. He has earned approximately 45 credit hours toward the associate's degree. Darin is a member of the college's minority male mentoring program. He is very driven to succeed and considers college one large competition which he is determined to win.

**Gerald** is a 48-year-old married student at RCC. He grew up near the college and was raised by his grandparents. He recalls it being a very strict home where he was kept sheltered until he was 17, then being allowed to go and come pretty much as he pleased. Gerald attended integrated schools in the area. He enjoyed school all the way through high school and said that it was like a community where everybody knew everybody. The teachers kept their eye on the students so they had to stay out of trouble. He had both white and black teachers and had no problems with any of his teachers all the way through school. Gerald indicated that he did not apply himself in high school as he should have and regrets it to this day.



After graduating from high school, Gerald worked for one year before enrolling in RCC. He only attended a year before his grandmother died. Subsequently he dropped out of school and became employed. Gerald recently enrolled to complete his associate's degree. He is an unemployed fulltime student and is currently enrolled in the Computer Information program, with 30 credit hours completed. Gerald is also a member of the college's minority male mentoring program.

**Isaiah** is a single 20-year-old student at SCC who grew up in a moderately large city in the north central portion of the state. He is the eldest child and has a younger brother and sister. Both parents were in the home. Basketball is his love and he started playing at age two. Isaiah thought about giving up basketball in middle school when he was cut from the team in seventh grade. He tried out in eighth grade and made the team, and is now on the college's basketball team. He stayed out of trouble and had perfect attendance in school until he was suspended for three days for tripping a white girl while in middle school. He says at the time of the incident he didn't think of it as racially motivated, but after considering it again and sharing it during the interview he believes that it might have been. High school for Isaiah was a time when he really focused on his basketball skills, which means he didn't put a lot of focus on academics. He made it clear during the interview that he didn't fail any classes, but that he didn't do his best.

Isaiah did not go directly to a university because of his high school GPA. His parents stressed the importance of education and his immediate goal is to transfer to a university and earn a bachelor's degree in athletic administration. Isaiah is very focused on his goal of

graduation and moving on to a four year institution. His ultimate goal is to operate a sports program at a YMCA or some similar facility. He is currently enrolled in the college transfer program and has completed 36 credit hours.

**Jack** is a 55-year-old married student at UCC who was adopted at an early age and raised by an aunt. He grew up in a very rural agricultural part of the state. He began reading at the age of three or four. His early education began in a segregated school system with integration occurring during his middle school years. The basic difference Jack noticed between the segregated and integrated school setting was that the integrated setting lacked discipline. Corporal punishment was not permitted. Some students were expelled for behavior problems. Jack had no problems in the integrated setting as many of the African American teachers taught in the integrated schools. During his last year in high school, he had only two courses to complete his graduation requirements so he attended school only in the mornings and worked in the afternoon.

After graduation from high school Jack enrolled in the local community college and after one year in college he enlisted in the Navy. Upon being discharged, Jack reenrolled in the same community college and earned an associate's in science degree. Currently he is enrolled in the Early Childhood Education program and has earned approximately ten credit hours. He plans to open a child care center assisted by his wife. Jack is also enrolled in divinity school while attending RCC. Jack is a member of the college's minority male mentoring program.

**Jaleel** is a 20-year-old single male and the product of a single parent home resulting from divorce. He is the youngest of three children and currently lives with his mother and sister. Jaleel was born in Georgia, but spent his early years in New York. He attended New York public schools until the middle of his freshman year in high school when the family moved to Florida. According to Jaleel, the New York schools were filled with violence and his mother wanted something better. He completed his freshman year in Florida. The family then moved to Michigan to live with his sister. He completed his 10<sup>th</sup> grade year in Michigan and then the family moved to a small town near RCC. Due to the differences in school systems, when he moved to the small rural community he did not have enough credits to move to 11<sup>th</sup> grade. He, therefore, spent half the first semester in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and the other half in the 11<sup>th</sup>. He reported not having any problems or issues with any of his teachers throughout high school. Jaleel completed his last two years of high school at a rural high school near the college.

Immediately after high school, Jaleel was accepted to a culinary school, but decided not to attend because he didn't have transportation. He did not want to be away from home without personal transportation. After working for one year, he enrolled in RCC. He is a full-time degree student majoring in business administration and has earned 24 credit hours. His career interest is culinary arts. He is learning about business at RCC and hopes to enter culinary arts school after graduation. He also works part time-fewer than 20 hours per week-and is a member of the minority male mentoring program sponsored by the college.

**Jesse**, the senior of the participants, is a 66-year-old retired divorcee attending SCC. Jesse grew up in the rural central region of the state near the SCC location. Both parents were in the home but neither had any college education, making Jesse a first generation college student. Jesse carried newspapers, raked leaves and shined shoes as a boy all the way through high school to earn money. He attended segregated schools during his early education and remembered the male teachers during his sixth and seventh grade years as very strict. It was normal for them to use a strap on students who did not complete assignments or who misbehaved. Jesse graduated from an all-Black high school.

There were no community colleges in the state when Jesse graduated from high school. He, therefore, attended one year of college at an HBCU within the state before enlisting in the Air Force. After four years in military service Jesse was honorably discharged and enrolled in the University of Detroit seeking to study Chinese and Russian. His choice of study caused a stir and he was summoned to the office of the university president for questioning. Jesse's enrollment at the university was during the time of the Cold War and his interest in Chinese and Russian drew questions of him about his concern with third world countries. He assured the university president that he was only interested in learning the languages to be able to communicate and learn about their languages. Jesse attended the University of Detroit for three years and later transferred to then Baker's College, earning a bachelor's degree in Industrial Technology. He worked for 30 years at Chrysler Manufacturing Company, retired and moved back home. He loves education and

upon returning home enrolled in SCC in the college transfer program concentrating in accounting and has earned 36 credit hours.

**Joe** is a 29-year-old student at RCC. He comes from a family of teachers and entrepreneurs who always stressed the importance of education and who has been very supportive of Joe. His parents were together until he reached middle school. They separated and ultimately divorced. Although he was in a two parent home until middle school, he spent quite a bit of time with his paternal grandparents because both parents were working two jobs. When his parents divorced he moved in with his grandparents and lived with them for two years. Afterwards he lived with his mother.

Joe attended public schools in the rural county where the community college is located. He has some difficulties during his early schooling and was later diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) at age 14. Once Joe was diagnosed, he understood his difficulties and tried a little harder in school. His teachers noticed he could really be a good student. He also was negatively affected by his parents' divorce as his focus was more on his family situation than school. He did make it through middle school and graduated from high school.

Immediately after high school Joe moved to a city in the north central region of the state and enrolled in the community college there. He also worked part time while in school. The money he earned seemed more attractive than his education so he withdrew from school. His dad and aunt talked him into enrolling in barber school, but he didn't like the work and quit. Joe worked at another job for approximately three years before moving back home

where he worked another three years with his father. He moved to another city in the state and enrolled in a vocational/technical school, but that didn't work out either, so after a year he moved back home and enrolled in RCC. Joe is unemployed and a fulltime degree student enrolled in the college transfer program, where he has earned 15 credits toward his degree. He is also a member of the minority male mentoring program at the college.

**Josh is** a single 26-year-old who spent most of his formative years in New York. He was born with a visual impairment corrected by surgery. Josh comes from a single parent home as his father left when he was two to three months old. All but one year of his public education was spent in the New York public school system. Josh came to live with his father in Urban City to complete his last year in high school. He encountered some difficulties in middle school with one teacher that hampered the development of his reading skills. Even today he has difficulty with reading and a three hour reading assignment usually takes him six hours.

On his eighteenth birthday, his father told him it was time for him to be on his own. He found an apartment, moved out of his father's home and enrolled at UCC. After attending one year Josh joined the military. The military afforded him the opportunity to travel to several states, including Alaska, Georgia, and California. After spending four years in active duty, he is now a member of the reserves. Josh is employed fulltime and currently enrolled as a fulltime student at UCC in the college transfer pre-engineering program with twelve credit hours completed. He is also a member of the college's minority male mentoring program.

**Kendall** is a 35-year-old married student at SCC. Kendall and his wife have five children. Kendall also grew up in the service area of the college in a two-parent home. He has an older brother, a younger sister and a half sister a few months his senior. His parents are not college graduates and worked hard to support the family. He began his education in his home county but shortly afterwards the family moved to a neighboring county where he completed his public education. In middle school he joined the band and became quite good, placing in several honor band societies in the state. It was his musical ability that seemed to gain him acceptance with his peers. He struggled with the feeling of being looked upon as less of a student, and his ability to play the horn gave him recognition. He noted that people would say, “Hey, that guy, he’s really good at what he does.”

He remembered there being some significant racial issues in the county, although he couldn’t recall specifics. He noted that many of his high school male classmates drove big trucks that had rebel flag signs on them. Kendall experienced some issues relative to race with a high school teacher. His mother had warned him about this particular teacher and he found his mother’s stories to be true. He said, “I could just sense a lot of racial tension there.” He indicated that there were no overt incidents, like name calling, but that these things did not happen because during that time, “...there were so many things out there that a person can do if they felt like they’re being treated differently because of their color.”

Immediately after graduating from high school, Kendall enrolled in a community college in another county. Upon graduation with a degree in music, he entered the workforce and continued to work until he was laid off in 2008. He and his wife filed for bankruptcy as

they strived to support their five children. Kendall enrolled in SCC and after attending for almost one and one half years he was severely injured in an automobile accident. He recently returned to complete his degree in Computer Information Technology and has earned 56 credit hours.

**Omar is** a single 24-year-old who grew up in Urban City in a single parent home. The family moved from home to home and Omar and his sisters changed schools frequently. Omar was raised by his mother with assistance from an aunt and uncle. His mother always stressed keeping the family together and the importance of education. A medical condition involving hearing impairment made school difficult for Omar. However, his teachers found him to be a very patient person and they provided a great deal of help for him. Omar didn't have many close friends in middle school or high school. Most were casual friendly acquaintances.

Omar's medical condition, resulting in surgery, delayed his enrollment in higher education for approximately one year. Initially he was interested in an associate's degree in automotive repair, so the community college was his first choice for higher education. Omar is currently enrolled at UCC in the applied technology program, having earned approximately 25 credit hours. He is also a member of the minority male mentoring program.

**Rashad** is a 52-year-old widower and a student at RCC. He was married for 24 years when his wife passed away eight years ago. Rashad grew up in a neighboring county and was raised by his mother. Being the fourth child of five, he learned responsibility from older siblings. The older children took care of him and his younger sister while their mother



worked. He described himself and his siblings as close knit even now as adults. All of Rashad's siblings are college graduates. He attended segregated schools through the fifth grade and was an A student. Integration negatively impacted Rashad during middle school and on through high school. He described the change from segregated to integrated schools as "culture shock." The classroom atmosphere changed and the sense of community and family was lost. Dealing with integration caused him not to really focus on academics as he was in the throes of an identity crisis. He indicated that his struggle was influenced by the way society was at that time with the actions of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and President Kennedy. Rashad was also dealing with some anger issues relative to his mother's struggle to support the family and his perception of society's role in her struggle.

Rashad was an outstanding basketball athlete in high school, and had college scouts recruiting him, but he did not pursue these opportunities. Instead, immediately after high school Rashad entered the workforce. Two years after graduating, he married and started a family. He returned to further his education eight years after graduating high school and completed a non-credit apprentice training program at the community college in his home county. The company for which he worked sponsored him in the program. Rashad is now self employed and enrolled in a credit vocational diploma program where he has earned 25 credit hours.

**Ray is** a single 22-year-old student at SCC who grew up in a two parent home in the community where the college is located. He has two sisters and a step brother. During his elementary school years he moved from school to school due to problems with other

students, who teased him quite a bit. His middle school experience was better after he won in a physical altercation with two other students. There was one middle school teacher with whom he had problems. She was Caucasian and, although there were other African American students in the class, he seemed to be the one always targeted as the trouble maker. He could not identify that the problems he had in middle school were racially motivated. High school was much better for Ray, and he specifically enjoyed his seven semesters in the Junior ROTC.

Both of Ray's parents are professionals with college educations. Education was seen as very important and family members stressed getting a good education. He wanted to enlist in the armed forces immediately after high school, but his entire family was against it. Therefore, right after high school Ray enrolled in SCC. He has earned 28 credits majoring in criminal justice. He loves being involved with the college's (SGA and is very active around campus.

The table below summarizes the participant demographics.

Table 1  
*Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Age	Marital Status	Institution	Enrollment Status	Credit Hrs. Completed	GPA	Program of Study	Campus Club Membership	Employment Status
Aaron	22	Single	Suburban	Fulltime	60	3.4	Industrial Engineering	None	Part Time <20 hrs/wk
Bill	22	Single	Urban	Fulltime	62	2.2	College Transfer	None	Part Time <20 hrs/wk
Darin	20	Single	Urban	Fulltime	45	2.5	College Transfer	Mentoring Program	Unemployed
Gerald	48	Married	Rural	Fulltime	30	3.0	Computer Technology	Mentoring Program	Unemployed
Isaiah	20	Single	Suburban	Fulltime	36	2.5	College Transfer	Basketball Team	Unemployed
Jack	54	Married	Urban	Part Time	10	3.5	Early Childhood Ed.	Mentoring Program	Unemployed
Jaleel	20	Single	Rural	Fulltime	24	2.0	Business Administration	Mentoring Program	Part Time <20 hrs/ wk
Jesse	66	Divorced	Suburban	Part Time	36	2.94	College Transfer	None	Retired
Joe	29	Single	Rural	Fulltime	15	3.0	College Transfer	Mentoring Program	Unemployed
Josh	26	Single	Urban	Fulltime	12	2.7	College Transfer	Mentoring Program	Fulltime
Kendall	35	Married	Suburban	Fulltime	56	2.6	Computer Info Technology	None	Unemployed
Omar	24	Single	Urban	Fulltime	25	2.0	Applied Technologies	Mentoring Program	Unemployed
Rashad	52	Widower	Rural	Fulltime	25	3.95	Vocational	None	Unemployed
Ray	22	Single	Suburban	Part Time	28	Not Reported	Criminal Justice	SGA	Fulltime

## Findings

The findings of this study are presented in order based upon the research questions.

First, findings relative to the experiences of these African American male community college students are described. Then the findings related to the personal, social and environmental influences the participants reported as influencing their decisions to persist are covered. The next section of the chapter deals with enhancers and potential detractors to persistence and coping skills of participants. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings.

There were four major themes developed within the study. The first two themes are centered on the experiences of participants in the college setting. Theme One was: the participants' interactions with staff, faculty and students affirmed and supported their academic endeavors. Theme Two was: most of the participants' classroom experiences fostered academic success, with a few exceptions. Theme Three was based upon personal, social and environmental factors and was: personal, social and environmental factors enhanced the participants' determination to succeed academically. All of the elements discussed in these three themes appeared to contribute to or enhance persistence in college. Theme Four was derived from findings dealing with detractors to persistence and was: participants exhibited the ability to overcome possible detractors to persistence. Table 2 provides a graphic display of these themes and the accompanying subthemes that emerged from the findings.

Table 2

*Summary of Themes and Subthemes*

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I. Experiences of African American male students in community college

Theme 1: The participants' interactions with staff, faculty and students affirmed and supported their academic endeavors.

Subthemes:

- a. Admissions personnel, other administrators and staff (secretaries, president, vice president) provided direction and encouragement.

Table 2 Continued:

- b. Faculty was very accessible outside the classroom for academic assistance and personal interaction.
- c. Students provided primarily casual interactions outside the classroom.

Theme 2: Most of the participants' classroom experiences fostered academic success, with a few exceptions.

Subthemes:

- a. Classroom experiences were generally engaging and interactive.
- b. Some participants experienced instances of differential treatment in the classroom.

II. Personal, social and environmental factors affecting persistence including enhancers of semester to semester persistence

Theme 3: Personal, social and environmental factors enhanced the participants' determination to succeed academically.

Subthemes:

- a. Discipline, fortitude and positive self-concept contributed to participants' academic success.
- b. Family support, influential friends, role modeling and community involvement fostered academic success.
- c. Programs, policies, procedures, and campus activities boosted participant self-confidence, dedication and sense of belonging.

## Table 2 Continued

### III. Factors that might detract from semester to semester persistence

Theme 4: Participants exhibited the ability to overcome possible detractors to persistence.

Subthemes:

- a. Differential treatment did not detract from participant persistence.
- b. Lack of institutional resources did not negatively impact participant persistence.

### **Experiences of African American Male Students in Community College**

The participants in this study shared stories about their experiences in their respective community colleges. These experiences encompassed their encounters with administrators, faculty, staff and other students, as well as the impact those experiences had on their decisions to persist from one semester to another. The participants encountered varying degrees of support for their academic endeavors at the colleges beginning with the enrollment process. This support via the colleges' employees and students continued inside and outside of the classroom. Participants overwhelmingly communicated a sense of support from the colleges. The study revealed two key themes relative to the experiences of the African American male community college student participants. The themes are 1) *participants' interactions with staff, faculty and students affirmed and supported their academic endeavors* and 2) *most of the participants' classroom experiences fostered academic success, with a few exceptions.*

**Theme 1: Participants' interactions with staff, faculty and students affirmed and supported their academic endeavors.**

The participants shared stories, beginning with the admissions process through the time of their interview, about the academic support they received from various individuals at the colleges. This support came via efforts on the part of college employees and other students who provided assistance in the enrollment process, offered academic assistance in various courses, and encouraged participants in their academic studies. The specific efforts as identified by participants constituted three major subthemes: (a) admissions personnel, other administrators and staff provided direction and encouragement; (b) faculty was very accessible outside the classroom for academic assistance and personal interaction; (c) and students provided primarily casual personal interactions outside the classroom.

*Admissions personnel, other administrators and staff provided direction and encouragement.* As described by the majority of participants, the staff at the colleges was very helpful. Beginning with admissions, college staff eased the process and reduced anxiety and stress for many participants. Seven of the participants spoke of receiving assistance from admissions staff. Jaleel spoke of the guidance he received from staff at Rural Community College:

We really had one-on-one time, sat in her (admissions counselor) office, discussed what would be best for me, what classes I should take, what I should transfer to, because I told her I wanted to... get my business degree, go to culinary school. She

was telling me what I needed to do, give me some more advice on universities, community colleges that offer it so I could do both programs at once.

Regardless of the institution, participants spoke of the high level of assistance received and the positive attitudes of the admissions staff. Isaiah, a student at Suburban Community College, recalled, "...they told you what you needed to do, showed you where to go, how to do it, I mean, they helped you out in every way...." There were indications of caring helpful admissions staff at Urban Community College as well. Josh stated, "I have this one person...she'll sit down, she'll talk with you, she'll break it down where you actually understand what's going on and what you need to do."

The assistance received from admissions staff by the participants seemed to help give them some early direction for their academic endeavors. Gerald had been very anxious about attending school and found that his admissions experience eased his anxiety while helping him to really focus on academics:

I...had anxiety when I came back to school 'cause I didn't know...which direction I need to go...all of those people...made it flow easier. It made me feel easy...it eased me off a little...kind a put me in a place where...I didn't have to be all, intense...I didn't have to be nervous all the time...

Rashad, at Rural Community College, remembered the process being smooth and easy. For him it was the system that seemed to be almost flawless. He had previously



attended another community college and needed transcripts and other information from that institution. He recalled:

...when I came here, any question that I had was answered. Any situations that I thought would confront me that I didn't know about, they were all handled...very well, so much so until I look back on my experience of enrolling and getting transcripts here, and all of the things I needed to do...it went so smoothly until I wonder, how did it go so easy?

The admissions process proved to be an easy, relatively problem-free experience for the majority of the participants. Admissions staff was very helpful and provided one-on-one assistance to help ensure that students were enrolled in appropriate programs of study and eased anxiety for some participants who were nervous about enrolling in college.

There were instances of academic support from college staff beyond the admissions process. Participants expressed a sense of academic support from staff that came in the form of guidance and encouragement. Darin noted strong support from a UCC staff member. He said that an African American lady who had earned a doctorate influenced him the most through her words of encouragement:

...when I found out she had her doctorate degree, and she's Black, and she's a woman. I'm asking her all these questions...she actually took her time...she talked to me and she told me that..., "you'll make it. It's not as hard as people make it seem. It's definitely attainable...you can make it...it's gonna be alright."

Isaiah, at SCC, talked about the support he received from the Dean of Student Athletes. The Dean provided encouragement for Isaiah as well as the other athletes, but in a slightly different form than that provided to Darin by the African American woman who held a doctoral degree. Isaiah shared:

I mean, he's there for us, when we're bumming or doing bad in a class, he's gonna find out what we're doing and what we can do to get better and what we can do to help ourselves. I'm on track to graduate and he's gonna make sure...he's down my throat about my grades and everything...so he's helping, he's probably the most important.

Josh, at UCC, had a math tutor who he says was the one staff person who supported him the most. His guidance made a real difference according to Josh:

...he's reasonable, and...some of the stuff he say is, kind of, hard to take, like when he's telling you, look, maybe you need to slow down...you shouldn't rush. he said it's best to do it slowly and succeed instead of fast and failure...he helped me out a lot and continues to do that and if I have a problem I can always talk to him about it.

There was other evidence of support via general personal interactions with staff as described by participants. Most of the interactions were with staff responsible for directing minority male mentoring programs at their colleges and other staff involved in special student activities or programs. These will be discussed in another section later in this chapter. The only other exception involved the relationship between Joe and the president

and one of the vice presidents at RCC. He spoke of their accessibility and said, "...they got an open door policy, so if you need anything...if you got any problems with class or whatever, they willing to listen, hear you out and take care of the problem."

Although Joe only talked specifically about the president and vice president, my observations of Joe as he interacted with other staff revealed that he had many supportive relationships with staff members across the campus. At one point during the observation, Joe entered the building that housed the president's office. As he entered, the two receptionists knew him by name and they engaged him in conversation for several minutes. After his conversation with the receptionists, he walked into the president's suite and began a friendly conversation with the administrative assistant sitting in the waiting area. That conversation lasted approximately ten minutes. It was no different in other areas around campus. No matter where Joe went, there were staff members speaking and holding conversations with him. The conversations were of a casual, friendly nature. During observations of other participants no interactions with non-instructional staff were noted. In general, participants had very comfortable interactions/relationships with non-instructional staff.

***Faculty was very accessible outside of classroom for academic assistance and personal interaction.*** The majority of participants acknowledged receiving additional academic assistance from faculty outside of class and stated that faculty members were very accessible to give that extra help. Bill, a psychology major at Urban Community College, shared how instructors gave that extra help:

...if I had a problem or anything such as academic wise, teachers have said, "You

can meet me here and there and we can discuss it.” There hasn’t been a time where I’ve actually talked to a teacher and said; “can we sit somewhere and talk” and that person has denied me. One of my psychology teachers is one of those teachers who said, “If you want to come to my office and talk about things, we can do that.”

There was one instance in which the faculty member conducted special study sessions to make sure students were grasping the concepts that were being taught. Jesse, the senior statesman of the participants, was more than grateful for the extra help:

We have a accounting review study on Tuesdays and Thursdays, where the teacher...from two o’clock to four will help you with your studies in accounting, and that...participation by that instructor...to have something like that available for the student is quite rewarding and beneficial for the student. It’s very fortunate to have...an opportunity for you to really gather the concepts and everything involved in accounting.

It’s one thing for faculty to set aside special times to assist students outside of the classroom; that time is scheduled and they are expecting to be engaged with students during certain hours each week. However, there were those faculty members who, regardless of their schedules or with what they may be currently involved outside of class, at any moment took time to provide academic assistance to students. Rashad gave such an example:

...well I had an assignment that was due today that I had worked on and had done several times...and just didn’t get it. And I went to my instructor today and said, “I’m just not getting it”...and it was lunch time and the instructor left his lunch

and what he was doing and came with me to the computer lab and sat down and went over the whole thing step by step. And I kept saying, “Your lunch gonna get cold.” And he kept telling me, “It’s a sub, it ain’t gonna go bad.”

Almost two thirds of the participants shared experiences of casual interactions with faculty outside of class that were primarily personal in nature. These were brief encounters around campus of a cordial nature, mostly exchanging pleasantries. Omar, at UCC, described his interactions with faculty outside of class as, “Generally just asking how things are going, how things are at home, anything holding me back from being focused.” Jack described very similar interactions saying, “...just as to speak to ‘em, maybe going through the hallway or outside, going from building to building, that’s about it.” Some interactions between participants and faculty were more than exchanging pleasantries.

These interactions might be termed relationships in that there was a friendly acquaintance established and there were brief to longer detailed discussions about topics other than school between the participants and faculty. Joe, at RCC, lauded the relationships he has been able to establish with various faculty members:

The teachers I’ve had, they got an open door policy. You can really talk to ‘em anytime you want to, whether it be they office hours or outside they office. They can be goin’ home and you can talk to ‘em and they will sit and talk to you thirty minutes...with out cutting you off. Everybody’s pretty much the same, you can talk to ‘em and they don’t rush off. You can talk to ‘em, pretty much about anything.

Josh, also at UCC, shared a similar story:

You can actually talk to some of the teachers as they are walking from class or just walking around campus, 'cause I always stop my old English teacher...every time I see her and talk to her.

Aaron talked about similar experiences with some of his former teachers:

...when I was taking auto body restoration I had automotive teachers that were my teachers then and every time I walk past their classroom or...go in their classroom, they start, "Hey how you doin'?" You still doin' body work? We talk and they still want me back in their program.

Kendall remembered one of his teachers who was retired military and how this faculty member went out of his way to do something special for him:

...he's retired military, and once he heard I was going in the military he said, "Kendall, get your running shoes on, we're going jogging." So for two or three weeks, man, we ran around this college, started getting in shape...I think he has been one of the most supportive.

*Students provided primarily casual interactions outside the classroom.* All of the participants indicated that their interactions and/or relationships with other students outside of class were casual and somewhat limited. These interactions/relationships ranged from a greeting in the hallway or student lounge to hanging out in the student lounge. Jack described infrequent interactions with students outside of class due to limited time on campus and said, "...I'm not on campus that much..." Gerald indicated he was on campus more

frequently, but he didn't interact with the younger students very much. He said, "I call 'em children...they be over there in their little cliques...I don't bother them..." Aaron described his interactions with other students outside the classroom as simply on speaking terms. He said, "We say 'hey' to each other...that's about it...I hold the door for anybody, they say 'thank you', I say, 'no problem...its' all good.'" Omar's description of interactions indicates they are a little more than casual, "Interactions with other students here would be...kind of a equal friendship, mutual friendship or relationship with other students...kind of a friendly environment in some settings." My observations of Omar, however, revealed that he didn't interact with other students outside of class other than for class-related purposes or in specific institutional programming opportunities. On one particular day his time on campus outside of class, with the exception of study time, was in the student lounge relaxing but not interacting with any other students.

Ray also shared concerning interactions with other students outside of class that were more than merely casual. He commented, "...me and a few friends, we all just gather around, we just talk about life and what not, and we just share experiences and things...we all try to plan get togethers and what not." Observations of Ray confirmed what he shared during the interview. His interactions with other students outside of class were friendly and positive. Ray moved from table to table in the student lounge interacting with other students. Interestingly enough, the majority of students with whom he interacted were white. Josh, on the other hand, described his interactions with other students outside of class as selective. He reported:

...I really don't interact with most...I pick and select group of people that we think alike and we act alike...people who aren't really loud and people who are actually trying to do something for themselves, and not hang out here at UCC like another high school.

Other interactions occur between the participants and other students which primarily involved hanging out. This type of interaction is similar to that described by Ray, yet with a slightly different twist. The hanging out, as described by at least two participants, was primarily with African American students. Jaleel described spending casual time with friends who came to college with him from high school. He said, "I just hang out with the same people, joke around...might go play basketball on the court." Observations of Jaleel interacting with other students confirmed that the majority of his interactions with other students outside of class were with African American students. Likewise, Joe interacted primarily with other African American students. Darin also indicated that he hung out on campus with mostly African American students. Similarly, observations of Darin bore out his claim. However, Darin found himself in somewhat of a dilemma. He wanted to continue to hang out with other African Americans but he wanted to find those who were serious about their education. He said, "I know it's important to surround myself with like-minded people that are focused and want to be successful." He went on to say, "it's...so hard to find...somebody my age that's focused...that's African American." In the end, what Darin had done was to hang out with other African Americans who spend a great deal of time in the student lounge regardless of whether they were serious about their studies or not.



On at least two occasions during general observations at UCC, a group of African Americans to whom Darin had introduced me were hanging out in the student lounge. They were there for several hours. Darin came in, joined them for approximately one half hour and then left for class. On another occasion I observed Darin interacting in a friendly manner with that same group as they enjoyed the festivities of Fall Fest. Darin participated in various games and his extreme competitive nature was very evident. He interacted and competed for approximately one hour and then headed to class, leaving his friends still enjoying Fall Fest. Darin's actions in both instances support his statement regarding the lack of influence his friends have on his commitment to his education. He shared, "People who are not really focused...I learned not to let them influence me...I'm...doin' the influencing, not them."

Rashad found himself surrounded by younger students, but indicated that his relationship with them outside of class on campus was very good. The mutual respect they had in the classroom continued outside the class as well. He commented:

...the younger students gonna be the younger students...they're gonna have their iPods and they're gonna listen to what they're listening to...I just have to say...periodically...who's this artist? Why've you got the explicit version here...and I'm not getting on them, because they're grown, (*chuckle*) and I'll just say, well...man, come on, you know that ain't right to listen to, but we laugh and we go and, but they take things to heart that I say as an older guy...

For most of the participants, the support received from college staff helped them meet the academic challenges either by guiding them into the appropriate course of study or through encouragement. Participants' stories revealed the willingness of community college faculty to provide academic support to students in their academic endeavors. Faculty members made themselves accessible to students for additional assistance outside of class in an effort to promote student success. Further, personal interactions with faculty outside of the classroom developed as a result of contact within the classroom and were casual in nature, with few exceptions. Participants found these interactions to be comforting, affirming as well as supportive. Interviews and observations revealed participants interacting with other students outside of class in casual friendly ways. A significant portion of those interactions were limited and casual, with few exceptions. These relationships were manifested through hanging out in the student lounge and participating in college sponsored recreational activities. With the exception of Ray, the majority of these casual relationships were with other African American students.

Generally, interactions between participants and staff and faculty affirmed and supported their academic endeavors. Fellow students interacted with participants casually outside of the classroom.

**Theme 2: Most of the participants' classroom experiences fostered academic success, with a few exceptions.**

Classroom experiences for participants, according to interviews, were very positive. Participants indicated that classrooms provided an atmosphere where they felt comfortable

and willing to interact with faculty and other students. Faculty and fellow students were supportive of participants in their quest for academic success. Data analysis revealed two subthemes regarding classroom experiences of participants. The subthemes are (a) classroom experiences were generally engaging and interactive and (b) some participants experienced apparent differential treatment in the classroom.

*Classroom experiences were generally engaging and interactive.* The participants gave accounts of their interactions with faculty who provided academic support. Faculty engaged students with special one-on-one assistance and promoted openly interactive classrooms. The atmosphere within the classroom made students feel comfortable and willing to participate. All participants stated that faculty was very helpful in their striving for academic success. The interviews revealed that the faculty often went above and beyond normal expectations to make sure that students were successful. The one-on-one assistance provided by faculty greatly impressed these students, as shared by Aaron at SCC:

I like my teachers...best teachers that I've ever had. Like I said before, they work with me...one-on-one...they make a real good effort to assist me in any way possible...I couldn't ask for better teachers.

Similarly, Joe at expressed his approval of the special attention faculty at RCC gave students in the classroom:

I'll say about 65 to 70 percent of the teachers out here take time out with every student to make sure everybody got it before the class ends...it's kinda like the teacher take the time to work on every student.

The openly interactive classroom, as described by the majority of participants, provided a high level of comfort conducive to academic success. Ray, a student at SCC, was very enthusiastic about the opportunities he was afforded in class to interact with the instructors in class discussion saying, “I love that I can get involved in on the conversation that the teacher will have about a certain subject. I love being able to put my two cents in.” Rashad, at Rural Community College, expressed his sense of comfort with the interaction within the classroom and how faculty respect students’ input. Specifically, he spoke of feeling free to correct faculty in the classroom and shared the following example:

...wait a minute now, that ain’t right, he should have done that a different way...there’s a way to come around and say certain things...in a respectful manner and in a way that the faculty member (says), “Oh yeah, thanks.”

The interactivity also occurred between students in the classroom. Students helping other students was a point that was shared with me by most of the participants. This interaction came in the form of working together on assignments, studying together for tests and quizzes, or working on group projects. Students’ willingness to help each other was an indication of positive student interaction in the classroom. Joe mentioned that the white students were actually more willing to help him than were black students saying, “It’s kinda one-sided to the Caucasian side, really...I don’t find too many African Americans that are willing to help you out...they just lookin’ out for theyself...” Jack described his interactions with other students in the classroom as “pretty good.” He also indicated that the majority of the students in his classes were female and that they worked well together, particularly in

group participation. For Jack the level of interactive learning in the classroom led to interactive learning outside of the classroom:

We get together and we study away from the college, and we strive to do the best we can on our tests. Everyone is agreeing and sometimes we disagree, but we all...learned how to disagree and still be on the same page.

Isaiah, at SCC, also spoke of good classroom interactions with students through group projects:

...we have a lot of stuff in class that we have to do with teams and projects...they're good, I mean, they don't really give you no attitude...cause I'm black, you're white, nothing like that. Everybody likes everybody...

When asked what he liked specifically about the classroom, Ray shared, "I can communicate with the other students and ask, seek help from some of them if they can help me." Aaron also talked about how he and other students helped each other. He noted, "I mean, the people in my class...we help each other out, no matter what. So, it could be, do it by yourself, but we still work together (chuckle)."

Rashad described the very close classroom relationship he had with fellow students. He said the relationship was such that several of the students call him 'Dad.' He specifically talked about the mutual respect that they had for each other and how the younger students would correct him if they saw him making a mistake:

...there're many times that they say things to me, even in some of our lab projects that we do...I mean, they will correct me if they see, ah, that I'm, "Wait a

minute...how you gone wire that?" and I'll give him the respect that he deserves for recognizing...that I could have done it a different way and with a different technique.

This study revealed that faculty provided a classroom environment that supported the academic success of participants. Faculty members were willing to take extra steps in the classroom to facilitate student success. Further, a majority of the participants reported of having good interactions with other students in the classroom. These interactions were facilitated by faculty giving group assignments and projects and affording students the freedom to work collaboratively in the learning process. Participants found these interactions to be very supportive of their academic journey.

***Some participants experienced instances of differential treatment in the classroom.***

Even in settings in which the overall atmosphere was very positive and supportive in nature, there were examples that demonstrated a less supportive stance. Such was the case as I interviewed several participants. While they shared glowing accounts of academic support from many faculty members, several participants also described experiences with faculty that were anything but supportive. These experiences involved negative treatment by faculty toward participants and other racial minority students that differed from treatment of white classmates. Darin, at UCC, exhibited facial expressions and gestures that showed signs of frustration as he shared his experience:

...when I was taking Advanced Calculus...I was the only black person in the class and...that was a hard class...it seemed like she (the teacher) didn't really

think...I felt like she didn't really expect me to pass so I had to go the extra, extra mile...she wouldn't even answer my questions fully. It was like, she just brush it off like it's not a real question (*Darin sighs heavily*)...she wouldn't even try to come over here to get me to understand it, it was just like, oh, he doesn't get it.

Similarly, at another community college one participant told of a negative experience in the classroom of a white faculty member. Joe, at RCC, recalled his experience in a class of mostly racial minority students and the differences in treatment of students of racial minority backgrounds:

...my first semester here I had a problem with, ah, with a Caucasian teacher, she was telling me...I wasn't doin' my work, and I was turning it in...she was givin' me zeros for it...the teacher give the whole class a hard time, so I was kinda like the one that stuck up for the whole class...probably about one or two white people in the class and the rest of 'em was Latino and black...to tell you the truth, the white kids were, were really doin' bad and they doin' the work wrong and then she favored towards them more than other members of the class. I talked to the college president about it and he talked to the lady. After that...it panned out then.

Isaiah, a student athlete at SCC, shared concerns about the treatment of basketball players at his institution. For him it appeared that certain instructors, mainly white, had something against the basketball players. On a team of fifteen players, all were African American with the exception of two, who were white. Isaiah shared:

...the teachers around here, they hold a bond against the basketball players. I've

been here three years and the problem with the basketball players is that in the same semester we'll have three people flunk off. It's the student always, but sometimes it can be the teacher. My cousin (basketball player) went here last year, and he had a developmental math class, and it was a white instructor, and he went in there to ask her something, and she just slams the door in his face! It was wrong. He's not even here no more. He messed up...but at the same time she didn't want to help him either. She really didn't!

Isaiah also indicated that the teachers don't cooperate with reporting grades to the Dean for Student Athletes. He indicated that when the team had overnight games and students had to miss a class, the instructors became very upset. He said, "It pisses them off...because you're missing, that just pisses them off, it really does." He sees their goal as community college basketball players as no different from university basketball players saying, "We're trying to do the same thing they are. We're trying to get somewhere."

Probably the most glaring examples of negative encounters with a faculty member in the classroom were shared by Kendall from SCC. In both cases the faculty member was the same white female instructor. The instructor was described as very rude and disrespectful. He said it had happened to him on more than one occasion. He talked specifically about an incident that happened on the first day of class:

...it's this one teacher I had a lot of issues with...first day of class, granted I walked in a minute late because parking was crazy. You had to park way on the other side of the street, and I walked all the way over here...She just chewed me



out in front of the two or three students that were in there. I just sat down, held my peace. Four other students (*white*) walk in and she literally greets them with a welcoming, “Ok guys, you’re just a little late. Just kinda be on time next time.” which is two or three minutes later. It was like I was being whipped, man. It was, “Don’t you know better not to come in my class late. I don’t care about your excuses. Well, you need a parking spot, you need to come earlier...”, and I mean this was like a two to three minute chewout.

In the second encounter, Kendall went to meet with the instructor in an attempt to determine the cause of the differential treatment. The instructor made clear to him her impressions of his ability to be successful in the program:

Even going to this teacher’s office, sitting down, talking to her and saying, “hey, what’s the problem?” Even doing that, she just stated, “You know what, you just not material for this curriculum. Why don’t you just quit everything and just leave?” Coming from a professor and a person of authority like that...I don’t appreciate that.

These accounts of the participants’ perceptions of differential treatment by various faculty members demonstrated that although, generally speaking, experiences were positive, there were exceptions at each community college. These exceptions gave participants the feeling that the treatment was prompted by the color of their skin. For Darin, Joe, and Kendall, the instructors’ low expectations of their academic ability were apparent. However,

with their overall experiences being positive, participants did not permit these occurrences to negatively affect their desire to persist.

Participants reported generally positive experiences in the classrooms. Faculty and students alike were supportive and provided opportunities to interact in the academic setting. Participants felt valued as learners and were appreciative of the supportive atmosphere classrooms afforded. Nevertheless, although the majority of the participants indicated that faculty members were very helpful and supportive in their quest for academic success, there were stories of differential treatment. Although these negative experiences were disturbing for them, participants were not deterred from striving toward their academic goals.

#### **Personal, social and environmental factors affecting persistence including semester to semester enhancers**

The participants in this study shared stories concerning personal, social and environmental factors that influenced their community college experiences and their decisions to persist from semester to semester. They talked about their personal lives away from the college environment including work, community and family life. The participants shared their insights on how the African American male is viewed in today's society as well as their thoughts of society's perception of them individually. Finally these students shared their perceptions of environmental influences within the college as well as those exterior to the college. A review of the information shared by the participants resulted in the development of yet another theme: personal, social and environmental factors enhanced the participants' determination to succeed academically.

**Theme 3: Personal, social and environmental factors enhanced the participants' determination to succeed academically.**

Regardless of any endeavor we pursue, our personal characteristics can help or hinder our progress. The same can be said of any social and/or environmental factors influencing our lives. The participants in this study were all impacted by personal, social and environmental factors relative to their community college experiences. Without exception participants' stories were filled with examples of personal, social and environmental factors enhancing their commitment to academic success. From their accounts regarding these factors three subthemes were developed: (a) discipline, fortitude and positive self-concept contributed to participants' academic success; (b) family support, influential friends, role modeling and community involvement fostered academic success; and (c) programs, policies, procedures and campus activities boosted participants' self-confidence, dedication and sense of belonging.

*Discipline, fortitude and positive self-concept contributed to participant academic success.* Various personal attributes or flaws are factors that influence how we experience life. They color our decision making process and how we respond in certain situations and to certain circumstances. The participants in this study are no different and possess personal factors that influence their experiences and persistence in community college. During the interviews participants shared information that demonstrated discipline, fortitude and positive self-concept. Discipline became evident as a personal factor as participants discussed personal time away from campus. When asked about how they spend a typical day not on

campus attending classes, eleven of the participants mentioned a period of time studying and doing homework. Nine of the fourteen participants did not have jobs. Most of them, including those who were employed, were involved in other activities related to family, church, friends and community. However, regardless of other activities and responsibilities, with the exception of three, participants mentioned spending time studying or doing some coursework during personal time away from the college campus. Josh works a fulltime third shift job. He commented:

I work at Wal Mart. I'm a third shift stocker, and I work from ten at night til seven a.m. I get home...eat breakfast. I take a quick 30 minute nap...get up and start studying. Work and studying...

Josh is in the military reserves and one weekend each month he has military training. He also loves the outdoors and spends the other three weekends each month hiking and biking on wilderness trails. Yet even during his recreational times, Josh made sure he spent time on school work. He stated:

I'm an adventurous kind of person. I like to push the envelope and do a lot of things...and I always take time to follow my studies and keep that going, because the way I work and I'm such a visual learner...I actually have to see it over and over, so it's constantly rehearsing the material so I've always gotta have that material with me, or some part of it to study.

Ray has a similar work situation as Josh but handled his a little differently. He shared:

Saturdays, I'll just...spend that time doing my own work, 'cause sometimes that's

about the only time I can really do most of my homework 'cause I barely get time during the weekdays ' cause I work all night and get up early every morning.

The reason Ray was up early every morning was that he was preparing to leave for class. Some of the unemployed participants rarely used their personal time away from campus for studying, but rather they used that time for family and other activities. They did, however, spend time out of class while on campus on class work. Kendall spent a lot of time outside of class, on campus, working on class projects and studying. He replied:

My wife and I, we're home schoolers. We have five children. Three of 'em are home schooled. There, (I'm) helping her out, making sure we got the week lined up 'cause it's very busy in our house. ...when I'm here on campus, I'm here, it's all about the books. I'm here sometimes til seven, eight o'clock at night. But when I'm at home, it's all about them, we're running around taking 'em to basketball practice, cheerleading, Boy Scouts...

Participants tended to carve out time during the week to devote to their studies. This time was either during the work week, on weekends or as a combination. In either case, they found the time to devote to their studies.

Some of the participants were able to transfer skills gained from work and family responsibilities to the academic arena. Aaron's view relative to work and its influence on his community college experience was refreshing. He saw his work experience actually having a positive influence on his college experience. Aaron indicated that he transferred the learned behavior of accepting responsibility from work to his education:

I was a set up technician, setting up the machines to run the material that they needed to produce. So, that's responsibility right there, making sure the machine...produces the amount that it needs to produce. This (education) can be viewed as a job, you get up, you come to school, even though you come here to learn, you also come here to take away things that you learn so you can use them in everyday life...furthering the responsibilities you have now or the responsibilities that will come. The responsibilities I've had have made me the person I am today, as in how I think and the way I do certain things. I'm more in lines of speed, accuracy and preciseness.

Family responsibilities also influenced the experiences of participants in community college. Acquiring negotiation skills was one of the outcomes from family responsibilities. Kendall, an unemployed 35 year-old married father of five, believes his experiences in taking care of family bills and juggling finances have helped him in his education endeavor:

I pay the bills in the house...juggling finances, it's taught me a lot...to be on time...here at school and just maintain. At this point in my life...I do a lot of negotiating with different facilities. Whether it's with the bill collector or...any other obstacle in front of me, it's actually taught me how to talk to people better, talk to teachers, let 'em know what's really going on. In some instances when I might be behind in the classroom, I know what to say to a teacher now, to say, can you give me another day?

The most prominent personal factors that emerged during the study were fortitude and positive self-concept. All of the participants, through their stories, demonstrated these qualities. These factors shone brightly when participants discussed their thoughts on society's view of them as African American males.

Twelve of the fourteen participants cited societal stereotyping as a factor impacting their educational experience in the community college. They described their perceptions of society's view of the African American male and society's view of them as an African American male. Eight participants believed that society viewed African American males in a negative stereotypical way. Additionally, all eight participants used that negative perception as a driving force to succeed academically. Evidence of the perceived negative stereotyping was present at each institution.

Darin, at UCC, shared, "...they look at us...like a whole bunch of 'em are slackers, not going nowhere...lazy. Not motivated or just don't care." Jack's comments offered a slightly different view from Darin's when he said, "Well, some people view African American males as uneducated...so because of negative stereotypes have gone on, they just agree with the stereotype." The idea of the negative stereotype continued with stories from other participants. Jaleel, at RCC, shared his perception of how society viewed African American males:

Always up to no good...getting profiled when you go to a store because of the clothes you're wearing...if you have baggy clothes...he might be stealing, he's a gang member. Everybody tries to profile you because of what they see on TV or

what they see in the movies. The store owner might watch your every move...and that's aggravating. I'm just tired of it.

Ray, at Suburban Community College, spoke of his perception of how society viewed him as an individual:

I think society's view of me as an African American male...would be just the same as any other African American male...just someone they probably fear for no reason sometimes...simply because of the...difference in the look.

Kendall had a slightly different approach to his perception of how society views him as an African American male. He saw it as a two-sided coin and stated:

...having an African American president (Barak Obama)...Caucasian people...might look at me now as... "He might have a better future. Maybe he doesn't have to run a football or shoot a basketball to really make it in life." Other times I feel that they look at me like, "Whatever you do don't let him get too high up because he might think too high of himself."

In spite of the perceived negative view by society of African American males as well as of this study's participants, the outcome has been generally positive for these men.

Fortitude and a positive self-concept facilitated a sense of focus and determination within them that served them well in their educational endeavors. Their comments during the interviews made this fact quite obvious. Darin spoke specifically about his determination to succeed:

I'm gonna make it...it makes me work harder. I can't be someone on the lazy



end, so I guess that just makes me work harder and just not give up...it's like, I can't 'cause I'm not gonna be on this end (lazy end). It gives me more determination. Jack spoke about showing society another side of African American males saying, "...we have to change the stereotype...so we have to work hard and show them another view...it makes me push myself to be the best I can be." Jaleel was very adamant as he expressed his desire to earn his degree:

I just want to prove 'em wrong...by getting my degree and being...successful. I try to stay on top of my work as much as I can. I don't want to be another stereotype, getting into school and dropping out.

***Family support, influential friends, role modeling and community involvement fostered academic success.*** Without exception the participants described the influence of environmental factors external to the community college. These external environmental influences ranged from family members to special friends and community responsibilities. Twelve of the fourteen participants referred to influences of various family members upon their community college experience. Family support is vitally important to any endeavor, and it was no different for participants in this study. Family members, including wife, mother, father, children or extended family, supported participants as they sought to attain their educational goals. Quite often the support came in the form of encouragement, whether gentle or a bit more forceful. When asked who, external to the college, supported him the most in his educational endeavors Rashad immediately replied, "My children." He then offered an explanation for his response:

Because they know my ability and they know my care and concern for this curriculum that I'm in, but also because of their encouragement for me to eat properly. "And make sure Daddy, that you've got some apples, you've got some grapes...keep your health up good so you can learn better."

Kendall spoke of his mother when responding to the same question. There was no question about his selection. His mother was his biggest supporter:

My mom, no doubt, hands down. In the area where she grew up, she didn't have a lot, so when she was able to get out and get her own education, get a good job, she just said, "Son, just don't let anybody get in your way. Don't let anybody tell you that you can't have something in life." She's just that genuine, but she supports me...even more now that I'm married. We talk every other day.

Sometimes the support came from extended family, as was the case with Ray. When asked about the source of support from outside of the college, Ray responded:

My family, because they want me to succeed. Probably more than anybody else, they want me to succeed. They constantly get on me about it. And (it's) the whole family, not just immediate, 'cause they all telling me to stay in school.

Although not technically support, Josh was positively influenced by members of his family for whom he served as a role model. Josh saw his responsibility as a role model for younger siblings influencing his experience positively by causing him to work harder for academic success to encourage his younger brothers:

Well, as an older brother of roughly ten children, I actually stand out and I...push

my brothers to actually go to school and to further their education...and for me to actually lead by example and work harder at my education to get them to do harder at theirs. So me and my brother kind of go back and forth. He's about to start the nursing program out at Mason Tech (pseudonym). That's the brother underneath me, and then the one underneath him, he's kind of in trouble...kind of dragging him out of trouble and trying to be a good role model for him...so I'm working hard to lead by example...

Several participants also mentioned that friends in the community influenced their community college experience. These friends encouraged the men and even assisted with assignments. In one instance, the participant was viewed as a leader/role model. Josh spoke of an extraordinary friend who was invaluable to his community college experience. He shared:

Well, I have a friend...he always push me to do the right thing. He always lets me know that, you may have to drop a class, but you can always come back to it and succeed. He'll actually swing by my house sometimes and help me with my papers...he'll proofread it. He'll print off...a book that he found on line pertaining to the subject so I can read it...He really goes out of his way to help me.

The influence of friends in the community on Darin differed from Josh in that his friends view him as a leader/role model. He employed that perception as motivation to succeed. He wanted to be a good role model:

Well, my friends...living back in the' hood, they look up to me. It's like whatever

group or circle I'm in, they kind of look at me as the leader. If I'm doing certain things, they look at me like, "I should be doing that." If I read a book on success or how to be a successful Black man, I go back and then I'll tell them...we gotta do this, we need to do that...

Darin sees himself as a positive example for his friends back in his neighborhood. He wanted to be successful as an example for them. Their view of him as a leader/role model in turn influenced him to strive for success. Thus, the support of family and friends played an important role in influencing the community college experience of the participants.

Although the type of support may have varied, it was support nonetheless.

Some of the participants indicated that their involvement within the community had an influence on their experiences in community college. For these men this took the form of volunteerism with charitable and civic organizations. Rashad volunteered his time working with youth within the community. He was a volunteer in the schools and with the local 4H Club as a chaperone. He also spent time with neighborhood youth teaching them practical information they might need later in life. Rashad indicated that his participation with youth in these various capacities has been quite rewarding and that it has impacted his community college experience in a positive way. He recently received an award for his work with school youth, and had this comment:

...they gave me an award, which was really nice, a trophy and a plaque and all these other things, which was unexpected...just doing my duty....and helping with the kids and trying to make society better, but that experience has helped me to see a

better experience here (at RCC) or enhanced here because what they saw or have seen in me I think my classmates and my instructors...all, pretty much, see some of the same qualities...so it's encouraged me to be even more courteous, more apt to lend a helping hand to my classmates.

Jesse, at SCC, also talked about the positive influence of his community involvement on his college experience. He volunteers with a local civic organization that deals with health concerns. On one occasion his organization coordinated an awareness campaign regarding the H1N1 virus and prevention measures. As a part of its efforts, the organization launched a campaign on SCC's campus. As a student at SCC, Jesse was instrumental in the success of the campaign, and felt a certain degree of satisfaction from his contribution saying, "You were able to contribute. You were able to give back or try to help out around the campus, or try to help the students and the instructors on the campus." As Jesse talked about the campaign his countenance changed and there seemed to be a look of pride and accomplishment. He was quite pleased to be able to contribute to the institution that had provided so much to him.

***Programs, policies, procedures and campus activities boosted self-confidence, dedication and sense of belonging.*** Policies and procedures are written to guide institutions in all aspects of daily operations. Those policies that most directly impact students were of particular interest to this study. Most of the policies and procedures relative to students and student outcomes were located in the student handbook of the various institutions as well as on college websites. Participants were asked about their perceptions of policies and

procedures that either helped or hindered them in their academic quests. With the exception of three, participants could not identify policies or procedures that either helped or hindered them as African American male students. Isaiah, at SCC, pointed to the policy that students must maintain at least a 2.0 GPA to participate in athletics as a plus: “ You gotta have a 2.0 (to play sports)...helps me out...keeps me up...so this school really cares for you to get out of here and go somewhere else.” Going somewhere else for Isaiah was to transfer to a university. Jaleel, at RCC, applauded the policy requiring students to take the College Student Success (ACA) course: “Having to take the ACA class...it shows you how to study...for your other classes...where to study and what’s best for you.” The one rule that was cited as a negative academically dealt with the restriction on the use of calculators in math class. Ray was unhappy about the rule:

...my math class...we can’t use calculators...which I think is garbage because other math classes get to...use ‘em. And I feel that if one...get to use ‘em then everyone gets to use ‘em. I don’t care how simple it may be or not. It may be simple to the teacher...but that don’t mean it’s simple to everyone else, ‘cause everyone’s different.

It appears that this was an individual instructor’s rule rather than an institutional rule. The only other policy that any participants mentioned was a no smoking policy. Two participants agreed with the policy, but were perturbed that it was not being enforced. Upon examination of various policies and procedures relative to student issues, I found most of the information boilerplate in nature, varying slightly in wording and location in policy. The policies and

procedures of the institutions within this study appeared to have no adverse effect upon participants' academic experiences based upon their interviews.

Various programs and college activities did have an influence upon the experiences of participants. The internal environment, as described by the participants, was welcoming and each spoke of individuals, programs and activities that contributed to the supportive environment they experienced. Both UCC and RCC offered minority male mentoring programs. Seven of the participants were members of the programs at their respective institutions and spoke very highly of the programs and their coordinators. As they described their experiences in the program, it became evident that the programs were value added components of their college experience. Josh viewed his involvement in the program as one in which he was a member of a big family or group of very good friends. Individually or as a group, with the coordinator, the guys could discuss any subject. Nothing was off limits:

...all types of problems I can go to Mr. James (pseudonym). Whether it be about girls, life, theories, God...he's pretty much like a stepfather to all the people in the program. Anything you would have a discussion about, we've had it...basketball, (other) sports, political views, the gas bill and stuff like that, in particular girls. We also learned a lot from each other. And it was like a giant group of people...just close friends or family.

During an observation at UCC, I was permitted to attend one of the mentoring group sessions. The session began with a huge pizza buffet with all the trimmings. I entered and sat with Darin and a few other members as they discussed a current event topic. It was just

as Josh had indicated, they were like one big family or group of close friends talking, laughing, debating and eating. The actual meeting was organized with an agenda that included encouraging words from Mr. James and then various activities to drive home the point of staying focused on academic and life goals. These fellows were in their element and appeared to have found a niche or group with whom they could relate.

There were other participants who found the minority male mentoring program uplifting relative to their determination to succeed as well as a place for a sense of identity. Jaleel, at RCC, made it clear that the minority male mentoring program was why he liked being at the college:

...the male mentoring program focuses on helping the males to succeed, and they do everything in their power to help you succeed with tutoring, talking, grades, advice...that's why I like this community college, it's 'cause of that group. If you have problems with a teacher, you can come talk to them about it. They'll help you find tutoring. They help you with school...get to see other universities, see what's out there for people who don't get to travel to other universities.

He also added:

...everybody know where you come from 'cause we all African American.  
...everybody has similar stories, and all trying to get to a better point, just all trying to get their diploma. That's what I like.

There were even others who saw involvement in the program as an opportunity to give back. Gerald described his involvement as such:



...it's not more like I wanted to be supported, I want to support somebody else.

That's more like what I get out of the program. It's not for me, it's for me to give back to the community...and to the younger generation.

The mentoring programs at UCC and RCC also included personal development of students. Institutional documents cited academic, social and professional skills development activities as a part of these programs.

Besides the mentoring program, participants spoke of various college programs and services that enhanced their academic pursuits. Community colleges typically offer various programs and other resources that assist students in their academic endeavors. Some of these resources are the result of grants specifically designed to assist first-generation college students succeed academically. Many of these programs are known as student support services. Additionally, many community colleges establish learning centers staffed with tutors and others as well as resource materials and computer labs to assist students who are facing academic challenges.

Several participants described services offered at their community college that provided needed academic assistance. These services came in the form of workshops, tutorial sessions and other types of guidance. Participants indicated these services were beneficial to them in their studies. Gerald, a first-generation college student, utilized student support services, particularly the workshops that dealt with study habits, and said, "...some of the workshops they have going on...study habits...when to study...what subject to study

first. Start with your easiest first and then go down.” Joe also took advantage of student support services and indicated that this guidance and assistance was available:

...they...been helping me out, too, as far as test taking, like our mid semester evaluation. They really steer me in the right direction if I need some ‘em off campus, off campus sources that I can use.

Rashad noted that he benefited from the tutorial services at his college:

The tutoring has been a benefit. I...used it when I was having a problem with something...I would get the time put in with me that I needed...so that’s been a great benefit to me.

Jaleel spoke more specifically about the staff and of one person in particular:

Ms. Jones (pseudonym) is helpful...if you have a question about tutoring, work study or anything, you can go to her, she’ll help you, or if she can’t, she’ll send you somewhere you can get help.

Student support services proved to be one aspect of the institution that provided academic resources that supplemented classroom instruction. These resources were important to the participants because they helped them continue to strive toward their academic goals. Upon examination of the colleges’ catalogs, student handbooks and other institutional electronic and printed materials, I found that student support services were a part of the overall student services effort at each institution, although the names of the unit providing the services were different. At one institution many of these services were a part of a federal grant, while at other institutions similar services were offered without special

grant funds. These services included tutoring, counseling, and workshops. Further, in addition to student support services colleges utilized learning centers to enhance students' academics.

Learning centers and other academic enrichment centers are common within community colleges. The participants offered stories of their participation in these learning centers and described the benefits provided to them. Josh particularly liked the learning center at his institution and utilized it for assistance in several courses:

I go there for math, reading, programming, writing. Basically, the staff, they really go above and beyond and that is, actually, ran by most of the teachers here...so you're actually learning what they're teaching in class, so if you're having trouble you can go and...they'll help you out.

Kendall utilized the learning center at his institution to do his homework and work on other projects while on campus. He stated earlier that, "when I'm here on campus...it's all about the books." After he got out of class he generally spent the remainder of the day in the learning center until he left for home. He's very appreciative of all of the materials and resources that are available and admires the director for her efforts to provide even more needed materials for students. He's also appreciative of the efforts of the center director to secure much needed software so students will be able complete course work when the only other computer lab with the software installed is locked. Kendall shared:

...in one particular classroom there is software on the computer, it's only in that classroom, so if you don't finish your work, you leave, the doors locked, that's it.

I came over here, I said something to (the director), right now she's working on getting that same software in this facility...so that I can...get my work done...

Learning centers are vitally important to community college students and in particular to those who are first-generation college attendees. They depend upon those resources to assist them in academic areas in which they struggle. They also depend upon those centers to provide supplemental materials that may not be readily available in other areas of the institution. Documents at each institution provided information about the learning centers. The centers were not all called learning centers, but they all performed more or less the same function. According to college documents, the centers provided a number of academic support services including computer assisted instruction, online support for distance learners, testing, listening laboratories and tutoring.

College activities affecting the college environment were also mentioned by participants as ways in which they were made to feel comfortable in the setting. Through their stories, the participants in this study illuminated the campus culture at their respective institutions as one that celebrates community. All of the institutions provided opportunities to celebrate community via social and cultural activities and personal development opportunities. Participants offered brief descriptions of college sponsored social activities and student organizations when asked about activities that positively influenced their college experience. Some of these activities were sponsored directly by the Student Government Association (SGA), while others were sponsored by the colleges' administration and all provided opportunities for students, faculty and staff to interact in a social, non-instructional

atmosphere. Social activities were primarily in the form of fall and spring festivals. Josh expressed great appreciation for the “little jamborees” UCC sponsored for student social interaction:

Well a jamboree is...when they have all these giant balloon characters...the military comes and do a rock climb...it’s basically when you interact with most of your fellow students. I think it’s the best because more people show to school...you’ll actually work hard to look forward to these little treats that the school puts on for you. So these activities around school really change the whole campus life. Actually...makes it brighter than what it normally is...just small groups sittin around and just talking about nothing.

The majority of the participants indicated that their participation in those festivals enhanced their experiences at the institutions. Joe acknowledged that, “I think it makes me feel comfortable.” When asked to describe activities that help him fit in at the college, Jaleel noted the festivals sponsored by the college noting that, “...it gives chances, just everybody, faculty...everybody to see them outside the classroom relaxed, just joking around. Yeah, I like that.” Jaleel’s perspective about the festivals was that it gave students an opportunity to see faculty in a different light other than just instructional, thus creating a sense of comfort. Jesse looked at it as more of an opportunity to engage and interact with other students and shared, “...students can get together from their classes and relax and unwind and spend time together and enjoy the campus.”

Participants were appreciative of the colleges' efforts to celebrate community. Another aspect of the campuses' community atmosphere affecting participants' matriculation involved opportunities for their personal development. The college's printed documents and information on college websites described various programs and opportunities for students to participate in personal development activities. Participants spoke of activities that focused on them investigating the next level of education. For instance, Bill shared an activity that helped him to begin to think about possibilities beyond the two-year degree, and what university he might want to attend upon completing the community college degree:

UCC hosts, I believe it's called...a college fair or something of that nature.

Different administrators from different colleges came, and...one-on-one...we actually talked to them. So UCC actually wants you to...if you want to transfer...they are going to give you opportunities to get in contact with those other colleges.

Yet another aspect of student activities that fostered personal development and positively influenced the college environment was student government. The SGA provided opportunities for students to become involved in college-wide initiatives, develop leadership skills, and learn to work together in collaborative efforts outside of the classroom. Ray especially liked his involvement with SCC's SGA:

I'm a part of...the SGA, I'm a senator. One meeting I didn't show up 'cause I wasn't feeling well and they all told me how much they missed me. They said the meeting was nothing without me. We...sponsored Activity Day and we had this jousting activity 'cause the SGA kinda got it as a favor to me, 'cause they

know how much I love it. I helped with the Health and Awareness Day we had last semester.

The celebration of community included college sponsored cultural diversity activities as well. Participants explained that these activities were positive influences on their college experience. For some it gave the impression that the colleges recognized the importance of the cultural differences. Josh spoke of the Black History Month activities:

They also have big functions like Black History Month, where they bring in big speakers...they had an African dance off where these tribes from other schools...beat on the bongo drums and (did) all these African dances for us.

Ray, at SCC, appreciated Black History Month activities indicating that, "it made me realize...how comfortable I am here." Omar, at UCC, was impressed with the college's cultural activities which acknowledged various cultures. He said, "...and they have other ethnic group celebration groups here, which...makes you feel more of an equal individual rather than a different group..." For Omar celebrating other cultures made him feel that, as an African American, his culture was not being singled out, but that his culture was just one of many different cultures, all equally important. Even Jesse spoke about his institution's involvement in cultural awareness and how it made him feel: "...the Chinese events that the college sponsored...made me feel really great that they were really becoming culturally involved with that."

Nine of the participants spoke of the positive environmental influences within the colleges that clustered around programs and activities. These influences were in the form of

mentoring programs, SGA sponsored social activities and college sponsored career exploration opportunities, as well as cultural diversity awareness events. These environmental influences provided participants opportunities to connect with students like themselves, ethnically, culturally and with similar goals. These environmental influences also provided participants opportunities to interact with fellow students of a variety of cultures and ethnicities in a social, non-instructional atmosphere. Finally, these environmental influences provided participants opportunities to explore advanced educational opportunities as well as collaborating with other students and college officials on college-wide initiatives.

This study demonstrated that personal, social and environmental factors affected the community college experience of these African American male students. Personal factors enabled them to dedicate necessary time for study, transfer skills attained outside of the community college experience to their educational endeavor, and use their inner fortitude and positive self-concept to transform negative stereotypes into determination to succeed. Social factors in the form of family support, influential friends and community involvement boosted their self-confidence for and dedication to the academic task. Encouragement and admiration of friends and family, as well as the satisfaction gained from volunteering made them feel better about themselves and their ability to succeed. Institutional environmental factors such as programs and services helped participants develop a sense of belonging and a significant level of comfort as a student in their respective community colleges. Various programs and



services also undergirded participants' academic efforts, providing necessary assistance to increase their opportunities for success.

### **Factors that Might Detract from Semester to Semester Persistence**

Although community colleges offer a variety of programs, activities and services to enhance the semester-to-semester persistence of students, there still may exist factors that detract from the persistence of community college students. These factors may be lack of adequate academic support resources or lack of an institutional culture that embraces certain students from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Factors that possibly detract students may also be from the environment external to the college. External factors that could have been detractors for participants include work, family and unfortunate life occurrences (death in the family, financial difficulties, serious accidents). At no time during the study did any of the participants indicate they had thoughts of interrupting their current studies. There were three participants who had enrolled previously and various life circumstances caused them to withdraw prior to attaining their educational goals. Each one has since re-enrolled prior to the beginning of this study and is committed to completing his degree. At the time of the interviews, each participant had completed at least one semester and enrolled in the subsequent semester. This study sought to discover what persistence detractors the participants encountered, if any, as they matriculated in college studies. Analysis of interviews with participants revealed one theme relative to detractors to semester-to-semester persistence which states that participants exhibited ability to overcome possible detractors to persistence.

**Theme 4: Participants exhibited ability to overcome possible detractors to persistence.**

Community college students face many challenges as they pursue their educational goals, and so it was with the participants of this study. As a part of their community college experiences, these participants encountered various occurrences and circumstances (detractors) that might possibly discourage or divert them from their educational goals. Further analysis of interview transcripts resulted in the creation of two subthemes relative to participants' ability to cope with possible detractors: (a) differential treatment did not detract from participants' persistence and (b) lack of institutional resources did not negatively impact participant persistence.

*Differential treatment did not detract from participants' persistence.* Sometimes there are events or occurrences that we do not readily recognize as negatively affecting us and subconsciously we develop coping mechanisms to overcome them, but they still can disturb. Such appeared to be the case with one of the participants. Josh, at RCC, experienced some issues in financial aid that caused him some concern. He questioned whether his treatment might have been racially motivated:

...you get those questionable moments, but you can't really pinpoint them. Like when you're in the financial aid office and the person you ask a question... answers your question with a question...but then they kind of side note with someone else and they talk to them and, like, completely ignore what you're saying and you end up in the back of the line again.

Josh had a sense that his differential treatment was based upon his being African American, but couldn't definitely attribute it to race. However, he did not permit any bad service or rudeness to deter him from pursuing his educational goals. Further, previously in this chapter I discussed other occurrences of the differential treatment of several participants in the classroom. Participants in these instances felt that their treatment was motivated by the color of their skin. These acts of differential treatment or microaggressions could have discouraged persistence. Darin's calculus instructor ignoring his questions, Joe's instructor's accusations regarding his work and her general treatment of the minority students in her class, the negative attitude towards the largely African American men's basketball team by several faculty members, and Kendall's very negative encounters with his instructor all evidenced racial microaggressions at each institution. Nevertheless, in each situation participants were not deterred from continuing to pursue their educational goals. Darin's competitive nature caused him to try even harder. Joe took matters into his own hands and spoke up for himself and the other minority students. He also approached the college president and vice president of student services to resolve his problem. Kendall continued to strive in his courses in spite of his instructor's attitude.

Participants were asked about other types of possible detractors to their academic goals. When asked about activities or events that made them feel like they didn't fit in at the institution, without exception participants did not identify any detractors of this nature. When asked to describe college activities or events that occurred each semester that

interfered with their studies, only one participant indicated that there was something that interfered. Josh talked about an event that occurs near the end of each semester:

They had this little event going...they had loud music, students coming in and out of the classroom just at random times where the teacher kept having to stop and start again. The teacher was like, "...well, you guys just read the book and try and understand." So I ended up staying late at school and missed my thirty minute nap before going to work.

Although he was frustrated, Josh didn't allow this disruption to detract from his persistence.

***Lack of institutional resources did not negatively impact participant persistence.***

Several participants spoke of a lack of certain resources relative to their academic endeavors.

Aaron was particularly disappointed with a shortage of some types of equipment and spoke about it:

...having the adequate amount of resources, as far as hands on equipment that students can work on individually... 'cause working in a group setting is great.

Sometimes just sittin' down with a piece of equipment...then you can...take it apart and see for yourself what it involves...

Similarly, Kendall took issue with a lack of a particular type of software in his program of study. He indicated that the industry is using an advanced version of the software to which students don't have access. He lamented:

Some of the software that's needed is in some of the classrooms, one of 'em is out of date. It's actually called, Dreamweaver CS3, and that's just a web design class.

Everybody's on CS5 now, so when you graduate you need to have CS5 experience...well, this college doesn't have CS5. There's another class to where the software is not available...so that hinders me.

In Aaron's and Kendall's situation, neither gave up on their academic quests. Though they were disappointed with the lack of instructional resources they did not quit their programs, but continued to take advantage of the equipment and other instructional resources that were available.

Other participants talked about other types of resources that were not available. Darin had a concern about an adequate announcement system to make students aware of various events that occur and said, "I think we need better...marketing...or something that would let us know about the events that are happening...so it's like a whole lot of events happening but we don't even know about 'em." Isaiah was interested in a particular academic program that was not available saying, "I wish they had like a sports management program or something like that." Again, participants did not permit the lack of these resources to negatively impact their semester-to-semester persistence. However, they were concerned that these resources were not available and wanted to make their concerns known.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter gave a description of the findings of this study in order of the research questions. There were four major themes developed in this study relative to the African American male students in community college as they pursue educational goals. The first theme dealt with interactions between participants and college personnel and other students.

A key finding within this theme was that the interactions with staff and faculty outside of the classroom proved to be affirming and supportive to participants. Staff provided direction and encouragement to participants while faculty made themselves accessible for supplemental instruction and personal involvement. The second theme revolved around the experiences of participants in the classroom and the impact those experiences had on their academic achievement. The key finding within this theme was that generally faculty made the classroom an engaging and interactive experience; however, some participants did experience differential treatment in the classroom that they perceived was racially motivated. The engaging and interactive classroom atmosphere was a catalyst motivating participants to move beyond the experiences of differential treatment and strive for academic success. The third theme illuminated personal, social and environmental factors that positively affected participants' academic endeavors. The most significant finding related to this theme was that the discipline, fortitude and positive self-concept of participants, as well as support from family and friends and community involvement, enhanced or promoted semester-to-semester persistence. Additionally, various institutional programs contributed to the determination to persist. Finally, a fourth theme focused on potential detractors to persistence for the participants. The key finding here was that participants had the ability to overcome various potential persistence detractors that included differential treatment inside and outside of the classroom and the lack of certain instructional resources.

The next and final chapter provides a study summary, and a discussion of the conclusions. Implications for theory, research and practice, as well as recommendations for further research, are included based upon further scrutiny of the key findings.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of African American male students in community college and to explore their decision to persist. This qualitative study also sought to describe these experiences and to discover any impact these experiences might have on decisions regarding completing a degree. It was based upon the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of African American male students in community college?
2. How do personal, social and environmental factors affect the persistence of African American male students in community college?
3. What enhances the semester to semester persistence of African American male students in community college?
4. What detracts from the semester to semester persistence of African American male students in community college?

The chapter is composed of four sections. The first section is a summary of the qualitative study of the experiences of African American male students in community college. The second section is a discussion of the conclusions arising from the study. Section three gives the implications for theory and practice, while the fourth and last section provides recommendations for further study of the phenomenon.



## **Summary of the Study**

This was a narrative inquiry qualitative study guided by a Critical Race Theory framework. Fourteen students participated in the study. Participants were purposefully selected based upon criterion sampling with specific criteria: a) African American male, b) enrolled in a community college degree program, and c) completed at least six credit hours, combined with maximum variation sampling with varied ages, marital and employment statuses. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 66. Nine of these men were single, three were married, one divorced and one a widower. Two participants were employed fulltime, three were employed part time, eight were unemployed, and one was retired. The college settings were such that there would be variation in size of student body (small, medium and large) and geographic location (urban, suburban, and rural). Additionally travel distance for the purpose of easy accessibility by the researcher was a consideration as well.

Data were collected primarily utilizing the in-depth semi-structured interview method. All interviews were held on the participants' respective community college campus. Sites for interviews on each campus were selected to provide an appropriate mix of privacy and openness for comfort of the participants. Interviews lasted for approximately one hour, and all were digitally recorded and transcribed with attention to confidentiality requirements. Participants were provided an opportunity to review transcriptions for accuracy and were contacted as necessary via telephone for clarification of any information gathered during the interviews. Other methods of data collection included participant observations and document review.

Participants completed demographic forms as a means of collecting basic information on each person. Observations of participants in the campus setting were performed, as well as general observations of interactions between students in various locations on the campuses. Field notes were written of observations using an observation guide. Participant demographic forms and institutional documents were also reviewed, including program brochures, diversity policies, student handbooks and college catalogs.

Four themes emerged during the study. The themes developed from the research questions and their accompanying subthemes are outlined in Table 2 (p. 136). Relative to the first research question concerning the experiences of African American male students in community college, two themes were revealed. The first theme was: participants' interactions with staff, faculty and students affirmed and supported their academic endeavors. The second theme was: most participants' classroom experiences fostered academic success, with a few exceptions. The second research question concerned personal, social and environmental factors affecting persistence, and the third research question centered on factors that enhanced persistence. Significant overlap emerged during the data analysis between the environmental factors of the second research question and the noted enhancers of the third research question. Therefore findings for both questions were addressed within one theme. The theme was: personal, social and environmental factors enhanced the participants' determination to succeed academically. The fourth research question dealt with detractors to persistence for African American male community college students. Within this research question the fourth and final theme was developed. The fourth theme was:

participants exhibited the ability to overcome possible detractors to persistence. Three conclusions were drawn from these findings and are discussed in the next section.

### **Conclusions**

Three major conclusions were drawn from the findings of this study of the experiences and persistence of African American male students in three southeastern community colleges. The three conclusions are: 1) Family and organizational/structural support are particularly important to the academic success of African American male students in community college; 2) There was no evidence of endemic racism, but there were isolated incidents of racial microaggressions; and 3) African American male community college students use negative societal stereotyping as a motivation for success.

#### **Conclusion one: Family and Organizational/Structural Support are Particularly Important to the Academic Success of African American Male Students in Community College**

Family support, as well as the academic support provided by the organizational structure of the institutions, promoted academic success for the African American male participants. There is a dearth of literature regarding family support as a factor influencing community college student persistence generally. The research that is available speaks mostly of the negative impact of family responsibility on the persistence of the nontraditional four-year and two-year commuter-college students (Bean & Metzner, 1985, Tinto, 1993, Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon, 2004). These studies tended to focus on the competing nature of family responsibilities with academic responsibilities. On the contrary, the

participants in this study with family responsibilities benefited from them by employing skills and behaviors gained from those responsibilities in their educational endeavors. The participants in this study also were encouraged to perform well academically by family members. One of their perceived responsibilities was to serve as a role model for several for younger family members.

There is some evidence in the literature that family support is important to the academic success of African American college students. Examples of studies demonstrating the significance of familial support to the academic success of African American college students include Allen (1992), Barnett (2004), Fleming (1984), Mason (1998), and Wilson-Sadberry, Royster and Winfield (1991). Barnett found that African American college students counted on family, particularly parents, for guidance and nurturance during their college years. Seventy-six percent of the students in her study credited their parents with helping them to persist toward graduation. Similarly in this study, encouragement from family members was a significant factor fostering academic success for these men, with the majority naming one or both parents. Although her study was not limited to African American male community college students, Barnett found that African American college students garnered the support from mothers first as mothers were more often the emotional base for the students. Barnett's work supported in part Mason's findings (1998), which noted that the most positive influence on African American male community college student success from a significant other was a significant female (mother, wife, girlfriend). The majority of the men in this study noted a significant woman as the external support base who

encouraged them and mothers were named most often. Fathers were also a source of support, though the encouragement was not quite as nurturing as with mothers, but rather more forceful with a “get it done” flavor. Children, siblings and even an uncle were all noted as providing support that fostered academic success. The whole family in some instances was noted as providing the encouragement to strive for academic success.

Family support is critical for African American students as it serves as a source of strength and survival and does not impede adjustment to college life (Stewart & Vaux, 1986; Wright, 1984). Gloria, Robinson-Kurplus, Hamilton, and Wilson (1999) indicated that family support was one of two strong predictors of persistence for African American students at predominantly white institutions (PWI's). Further, family support provided a positive influence that undergirded participants as they worked toward their educational goals. Bonner and Bailey (2006) noted that African American male college students are significantly influenced academically by family. Specifically they posited, “Encouragement and support from the family unit, through accolades and admonishment, is translated into student academic commitment and persistence” (p. 29). The aforementioned research addresses African American students at PWI's and African American male students in higher education generally. An extrapolation of these findings suggests that this same familial support is important to African American male students in community college. Admonishments for the participants in this study encouraging them not to give up or let anyone stand in the way of success, as well as the “you can do it” expressions provided a sort

of safety net. This support promoted academic success and persistence for these African American male community college students.

Not only was family support significantly important to the academic success of these participants, but organizational/structural support enhanced academic success as well for these African American male students. Various theories have been posited regarding organizational culture and structure (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Scott, 1987; Senge, 1990; Tierney, 1988). These theories suggest that organizations are systems that may be open or closed based upon the degree to which they respond to the external environment. Higher education institutions are considered open systems and they are, or should be learning organizations (Scott, 1987). Further, the type of organizational culture and structure on higher education campuses is dependent upon certain characteristics including size, celebration of community and college community atmosphere (competitive, casual or cohesive) (Berger, 2001; Kuh, 2001).

Research has shown that organizational structure impacts the academic success of students in commuter and community colleges (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Bers and Smith, 1991; Halpin, 1990; Tinto, 1993, 1997). Through its organizational structure the institution can create an atmosphere, inside and outside of the classroom, which fosters academic success and ultimately persistence. Within the classroom these institutions can create opportunities for students to academically integrate into the college community. One such opportunity is manifested via learning or classroom communities (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Hirschy & Wilson, 2002; Hoffman et al. 2002; Tinto, 1997). These

communities provide for interactive learning that involves role playing, cooperative learning, discussions and group work which facilitate student to student interactions as well as student to faculty interactions. These types of activities on the campuses visited emerged as one factor that enhanced the experiences of the men in this study. Classroom discussions and working collaboratively with fellow students on assignments and group projects were noted as positive factors promoting academic success. The interactive classrooms at each of the colleges made these African American men comfortable and willing to actively participate in the learning process. Findings from this study concur with the literature regarding the importance of positive classroom experiences and the impact of interactive learning for the college student.

Involvement with faculty is important for African American male student academic success (Bush & Bush, 2010; Dawson-Threat, 1997; Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt, 1997; Spradley, 2001; Patitu, 2000; & Vella, 1994). When African American male college students perceive that faculty is truly interested in their well-being and academic success, intellectual and personal growth is fostered (Gonzalves, 2002). Faculty engagement as a part of organizational/structural support was noted as very important in the participants' quest for academic success. Bush and Bush (2010) found that faculty interaction was significant in predicting the academic achievement of African American male students in community college. They recommended that community colleges establish formal mentorship programs between faculty members and African American male students. Mentorship programs can provide opportunities for interaction that can increase the likelihood of higher academic

achievement and personal growth for African American male students. For example, the engagement and accessibility of faculty provided academic assistance outside of the classroom, but also provided personal interactions for participants in this study.

One final aspect of organizational/structural support provided by the colleges that helped participants academically was the availability of various campus programs and activities. Programs and activities included mentoring and cultural and social initiatives. Astin (1993) noted that peer influence is the single most influential factor on undergraduate student academic and personal development. More recent research confirms that programs and activities promoting student-to-student interactions are important to the academic success of African American male college students (Brown, 2006). Mentoring is one such program. Minority male mentoring programs have been noted to have a very positive impact on persistence of African American male college and community college students (Brown, 2006; Glenn, 2003; Pope, 2002, 2006; Stromei, 2000; Szelenyi, 2001). Two of the institutions in the current study operate minority male mentoring programs, and many of the study participants were members. These programs promoted academic success for participants via the support provided. Participants mentioned counseling, tutoring, peer interaction and goal setting as elements of the programs that helped them succeed. Further, participants noted that the mentoring programs help foster a sense of belonging at the institutions. This sense of belonging emerged from the camaraderie and brotherhood within the programs. This tends to have a positive effect on persistence (Hoffman et al., 2002) and



is related to the positive influence of student involvement as noted by Berger and Milem (1999).

Community colleges typically have a very diverse student body. Pope (2006) noted that African American male students benefit from a diverse student body. Participants in this study noted their appreciation of various campus activities that facilitate increasing their knowledge of other cultures and their interaction with students of other cultural backgrounds. Additionally, participants noted the importance of various social activities on their campuses. Both types of activities, as noted by participants, helped them feel that they truly fit in and were a part of the institution. In other words, these activities also fostered participants' sense of belonging. Both types of activities celebrated community and fostered a sense of community within the institutions depicting a cohesive type atmosphere. The activities also demonstrated an institutional appreciation for diversity. These findings support aspects of Kuh (2001) and Berger (2001) relative to organizational culture/structure.

**Conclusion two: There was No Evidence of Endemic Racism, but There were Isolated Incidents of Racial Microaggressions**

Some African American male students in community colleges may experience instances of racial microaggressions from faculty and staff, as illustrated in this study. According to Critical Race Theory, race and racism are central in U.S. society (Bell, 1987). Omi and Winnant (1994) indicated that the concept of racism emerged from racial formation theory wherein one group is privileged to the exclusion and deprivation of others and that one group exercises the power to discriminate. Racism, as noted by Ladson-Billings and

Tate (1995), refers to culturally sanctioned beliefs which, regardless of the intentions involved, defend the advantages Whites have because of the subordinated positions of racial minorities. The exclusion and deprivation resulting from racism facilitates negative differential treatment of African American students and other students of color in higher education. Thus, negative differential treatment rooted in the notion of race can be deemed racism.

The literature clearly evidences racism, via differential treatment, against African American students on college campuses in the U.S. (Feagin, 1992; Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Suárez-Balcázar, Orellana-Damacela, Portillo, Rowan, & Andrews-Guillen, 2003; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003; Sydell & Nelson, 2000). This differential treatment is experienced by African American students in a variety of campus situations (Fisher & Hartman, 1995; McCormick, 1995; Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000). Differential treatment of African American students includes verbal expressions of prejudice, poor service, staring and glaring, and rudeness, according to Swim et al. (2003). Additionally, this treatment can occur inside and outside of the classroom. This study uncovered incidents of differential treatment of the African American male participants. There were accounts of obvious negative differential treatment within the classroom, such as one African American male student who was berated for arriving late to class while White students arriving even later were not. Participants perceived racism on the part of certain faculty members. Their perceptions were supported by the lack of similar treatment of non-minority students by these

same faculty members. Participants also gave accounts of rudeness and verbal expressions of perceived prejudice by faculty members. Rhoads (1999) noted that comments from faculty and administrators indicating that racial minority students either lacked the ability or interest to pursue high academic goals were evidence of racism. Participants in this study experienced similar comments from faculty questioning their ability to be successful in certain academic programs. Additionally, some faculty in-class behavior was perceived as evidence of their belief in the inability of some of these participants to perform well academically, such as a faculty member ignoring one African American male student's questions.

Often the differential treatment is not overt and obvious. Low academic expectations of African Americans is noted as one subtle form of racism evidenced by differential treatment, and is categorized with other subtle forms of racism termed racial microaggressions (Solórzano et al., 2000). According to Solórzano and his colleagues, racial microaggressions are "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously" (p. 60). These researchers demonstrated that racial microaggressions exist in academic and social spaces of college campuses and include being ignored in the classroom and low academic expectations by faculty. On the surface they may not appear racially motivated, but these insults tend to be directed toward racial minority students. Elmers and Pike (1997) proposed that African Americans experience more differential treatment because they stand out more than any other minority group. Suárez-Balcázar et al. (2003) supported Elmers and Pike's findings with empirical evidence

demonstrating that African American students experience more occurrences of differential treatment than Hispanic, Asian, and Caucasian students. This study demonstrated that African American male students also experience instances of racial microaggressions. The instances reported by participants were in the form of low academic expectations by faculty, being ignored by faculty in the classroom setting, and receiving poor service from staff. There were instances of differential treatment at each institution. Geographic differences of urban, suburban and rural settings made no significant difference in the noted frequency of occurrences of differential treatment directed toward the participants. However, the more overt and obvious forms of differential treatment occurred at the mid sized suburban college. It is also noted that this was the one college in the study that did not operate a minority male mentoring program.

This study confirms extant literature (Feagin, 1992; Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Solòrzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Suárez-Balcázar, Orellana-Damacela, Portillo, Rowan & Andrews-Guillen, 2003; Swim, Hyerws, Cohen, Fitzgerald & Bylsma, 2003; Sydell & Nelson, 2000) of the continued existence of racism in higher education albeit limited to individual acts and attitudes of some faculty and staff. This study also extends the literature demonstrating the existence of racist acts and attitudes on the part of faculty and staff in community colleges against African American male students. This study further confirms that racial microaggressions, via negative differential treatment, exist for African American college students, and again extends the literature demonstrating the existence of these occurrences against African American male community college students.

### **Conclusion three: African American Male Community College Students use Negative Societal Stereotyping as a Motivation for Academic Success**

Negative societal stereotyping of these participants served as motivation for them to succeed academically. Participants were very aware of the negative image society has of them as African American males. However, they exhibited a determination to prove society wrong regarding their academic abilities and their desire to be successful. Participants' motivation to be academically successful seemed to stem in part from their knowledge of negative stereotyping. All participants were positive regarding their ability to succeed in their educational endeavors. In other words, participants possessed a strong positive self-concept of themselves and their abilities as students. Hagedorn, Maxwell and Hampton (2001) noted that self-confidence was one significant predictor of persistence for African American male community college students.

Negative stereotyping of African Americans has been supported by scientific research (Hilliard, 1979; Kamin, 1974; Madaus, 1994) claiming to validate the idea of African American intellectual inferiority to Whites. Moreover, Sowell (1984) indicated that African Americans were culturally, rather than genetically, inferior to Whites, and this cultural inferiority results in laziness, shiftlessness, criminality, ignorance and immorality. These attributes, according to Sowell, rightly place African Americans as subordinate to Whites. Solórzano and Yosso (2001) noted that racial stereotyping had influenced the U.S.

educational system in forming its opinions and expectations of African Americans. Davis (2003) found that African American males are disadvantaged and encounter several negative consequences for being African American during their primary and secondary education. Further, Jenkins (2006) concurs with Davis, noting that African American boys are not nurtured, suffer from low expectations from teachers and generally fail to receive an adequate education in the early childhood educational institutions. These occurrences, according to Jenkins, result from the negative stereotyping and opinions of African Americans. It is these opinions and expectations that negatively impact African American males in education beginning at a very early age and continuing through post-secondary education.

Solórzano and Yosso (2001) broke out stereotypes of African Americans, Chicanas/os and Native Americans into three general categories: 1) intelligence and educational stereotypes; 2) personality or character stereotypes; and 3) physical appearance stereotypes. Media stereotypes most often represent African Americans as stupid, violent and unclean (Solórzano & Yosso). Participants expressed significant knowledge of negative stereotypes of African Americans based upon personal experiences and/or the experiences of friends and family, and on how African American males are portrayed in the media. The experiential knowledge tenet of CRT is applicable here, for it is the storytelling of experiences that provides the information from the viewpoint of those experiencing the phenomenon. In this instance the phenomenon is negative stereotyping of African American males. Participants' shared stories are noted in the literature as personal stories (Solórzano &

Yosso). According to Delgado Bernal (2002) personal stories are testimonies that contain the message of the impact of racial discrimination on the lives of people of color. Participants gave their testimonies of negative stereotyping of them by society.

The notion of African American men as violent and dangerous is well documented in the literature (Oliver, 2003; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Thomas, 2007). Participants affirmed that this view is a common stereotype perceived by Whites of African American men. Media, particularly the news media, according to Oliver, portray African American men as more violent than Whites. It is this view that most fuels the flames of violent and dangerous stereotyping of African American men. Participants also affirmed the literature which posits that African Americans are stereotyped as lazy, ignorant and uneducated. They noted that society viewed them as uneducated, unwilling to perform academically or unable to do so. Participants perceived society as seeing them going nowhere in life. Of course, this means they would become a burden on society and possibly revert to criminal activity.

Without exception, participants rejected the negative stereotyping of themselves as African American males. Instead, knowledge of the negative stereotype seemed to serve as a catalyst for their determination to succeed. They were determined to be successful academically in spite of the view society had of them as African American males.

Participants wanted to show society another side of the African American male; they wanted to prove society wrong. As a part of that determination, participants took advantage of the various academic support resources that the colleges made available. Additionally, the literature notes that nontraditional community college students, such as the participants, tend

to have difficulty succeeding due to other life obligations not related to their college education (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Tinto, 1993). The determination of these African American male students countered any negative factors that the external environment might have presented. Positive self-concept was displayed by all of the participants, which also contributed to their determination to succeed. Although many of them grew up in single parent homes, positive self-concept and the importance of education was constant. Providing opportunities for developing a positive self-concept is essential to the academic success of African American males (Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003). Hrabowski, Matson and Greif (1998) found that determined parental academic engagement during the child's formative years was a significant factor influencing attitudes of African American males toward education. In other words, positive involvement of parents early in their son's education helps to create a desire to be successful academically in spite of obstacles. The participants in this study experienced that positive influence and each one of them believed they could and would be successful academically regardless of society's view of them as ignorant, uneducated, and going nowhere. Their display of a positive self-concept, confidence in their abilities, and a belief in the importance of education supports findings of Hagedorn, Maxwell and Hampton (2001) regarding self-confidence and a high degree of emphasis on completing college as predictors of African American male community college student persistence.

Current literature indicates that negative stereotyping of people of color, particularly African American males, negatively impacts their educational endeavors. However, the



current study demonstrates that negative stereotyping can be employed in such a way as to positively impact the educational experience of African American male students in community college. Although aware of the negative view that society held of them, the participants in this study used that view as a motivating force to be all they could be in the academic arena. The stereotype was rejected by all of the participants and each, in his own way, pursued his educational goals with determination. Positive self-concept played a major role in that determination and the belief that the goals were attainable. Without an exception all participants reversed negativity into positivity and reached for greater levels of educational attainment.

### **Implications for Theory and Practice**

The findings from this study offer several implications for theory and practice from the African American male community college student perspective. Relative to theory, there are implications for critical race theorists about the continued existence of racism within the higher education system as well as implications concerning the tenets of Critical Race Theory. There are also implications for student persistence theorists concerning the importance of familial influence in the educational process of African American male community college students. From a practical perspective there are implications for community college administrators, faculty and staff regarding the needs of African American male students.

Generally the findings of this study indicated that African American male students at the study institutions engaged the institutional environment and external environment in such

a manner as to positively impact their community college experiences. Their engagement with these environments fostered a positive self-concept that helped them overcome negative stereotypes of the African American male and perceived microaggressions. The positive experiences of the participants were influenced by family encouragement, their own sense of determination, and a supportive organizational structure in place at the institutions. Our understanding of the ways African American males experience the community college is extended by these implications.

### **Implications for Theory**

Critical Race Theory was the framework that guided this study. Based upon the tenets of CRT, the expectation was to see evidence of the centrality of race and racism at these institutions. Although the findings in this study do not indicate the centrality of race and racism at these institutions, there was evidence of racist attitudes at each institution. Several participants shared stories of negative differential treatment of themselves and other racial minority students. There were no significant expectations of finding evidence of institutional efforts to challenge dominant ideology, another tenet of CRT. However, each college celebrated the positive contributions of African Americans, including those of African American males, in our society. Additionally, two colleges offered minority male mentoring programs that focused on academic success, leadership development, and socio-economic advancement. These efforts on the part of the institutions might be viewed as initiatives to challenge dominant ideology regarding the African American male. This line of thought suggests another way to view the tenet of challenging dominant ideology in

education. Generally in CRT efforts to challenge dominant ideology in education revolve around challenging policies and practices within the educational system that tend to put racial minorities at a disadvantage. The implication herein suggests that the dominant ideology is also challenged via accentuating the positive attributes and contributions of the group that has been historically denigrated. In other words, CRT can be utilized by institutions to examine their efforts to accentuate positive attributes and contributions of African Americans and African American males specifically.

In addition, within CRT there is the notion that African American males, as involuntary minorities, tend to develop coping skills that result in rejecting the dominant cultural idea of the importance of academic success as a pathway to a successful life (Ogbu, 1990). The narratives of the participants give us a different view for consideration when examining the coping skills of African American males relative to the ideals and pressures of the dominant culture. All of the participants possessed a significantly strong sense of racial identity and they all understood what it meant to be an African American male in U.S. society, yet their coping skills did not include the rejection of the importance of academic success. Not only does their development of positive coping skills have implications relative to Ogbu's theory, but there are implications relative to challenging the dominant ideology as well. One might consider their quest for academic success as a personal agenda of challenging the dominant ideology relative to the stereotype of African American males.

Further, there are implications for CRT regarding experiential knowledge through storytelling and proponent commitment to social justice. Specifically, one implication is

that this study provides confirmation of the necessity of experiential knowledge through personal stories which give voice to those experiencing the phenomenon. The personal stories in this study paint pictures of African American males of various ages and backgrounds striving to overturn the societal view of them as a group. These personal stories reveal complex individuals with desires for success and accomplishments as would any other American citizen. Experiential knowledge, through participant stories, provides us evidence of continued racist attitudes in higher education. A second implication is that the tenet, proponent commitment to social justice, is played out in the lived campus experiences of the majority of participants in this study. The commitment to social justice is demonstrated in the programs designed specifically to facilitate the academic success of African American male students. The proponents in these instances are the institutions as they attempt to level the playing field in the social and economic mobility arena for these students. The importance of an interdisciplinary approach was reinforced through this study as the consideration of historical and contemporary contexts were factors in the analysis of the data. Additionally, gender was introduced as the examination involved male students. There was an intersection of race and gender that impacted the lived experiences of the participants.

Finally, there is an implication for student persistence theory garnered from this study. Traditionally, student persistence theory for community colleges suggests that academic and social integration of students into the institution is critical to persistence (Berger & Milem, 1999; Pope, 2006; Schmid & Abell, 2003). Some studies have demonstrated that academic integration is more significant to persistence than social

integration (Bers & Smith, 1991; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Halpin, 1990; Tinto, 1997). Although there are differing views regarding academic and social integration relative to persistence, we glean from extant literature that the most important factor positively influencing persistence of students in community colleges, including African American males, is the academic and social environment of the institution. Although this study does support this view, it also implies that positive family influence is significant to the persistence of African American male community college students. The literature points to the importance of family influence on student adjustment and persistence of traditional aged students in four-year colleges and universities. However, to my knowledge the literature ignores the positive familial influence on community college students and particularly on African American male community college students. This study, through the narratives of the participants, provides another lens to examine factors that influence student persistence in community college.

### **Implications for Practice**

Implications for practice revolve around initiatives community colleges may need to develop to facilitate the academic success and retention of African American male students. This study demonstrated the significance of a minority male mentoring program to the academic success and college integration of participants. Community college student services administrators wrestling with dismal retention and graduation rates of African American male students may need to consider establishing minority male mentoring programs, for which excellent models exist. These programs must have several important

components that provide (a) advocacy for African American male students in the academic setting; (b) opportunities for them to support fellow students and for personal growth; (c) a fraternal atmosphere among program participants; and (d) a sense of cultural commonness among program participants. Mentoring programs offering these components provide African American male community college students with a place of refuge where they can be themselves and discuss issues they face daily. These programs must also challenge participants to stretch themselves academically and emotionally to promote growth to their full potential. When establishing these programs, senior administrators as well as those in student services must seek and secure adequate funding sources to sustain the types of activities that impact the experiences of African American male students in a positive way on their college campuses. The state in which this study was conducted mandated that community colleges provide mentoring programs for minority male students. Securing adequate funding for mentoring programs demonstrates administrative commitment to the success of these students.

Administrators may also need to consider either establishing or increasing opportunities for students to interact with students of diverse cultural backgrounds. College administrators, faculty and staff might be purposeful in committee member selection for student based committees to ensure there is good cross cultural representation. Colleges might also provide opportunities for students of diverse cultural backgrounds to showcase their culture to the student body, providing opportunities for interaction and discussion.

This study also demonstrated the importance of family support. The implication for student services professionals particularly is that colleges may need to provide opportunities for family involvement on campus at various points during students' time at the institution. Opportunities for family members to view work from special projects, attend special performances or visit program facilities and meet faculty members are a few examples.

Additionally, for community college faculty, the study demonstrates that engaging and interactive classrooms foster academic achievement for African American male students. The literature notes that people of color are more successful in a learning environment that is collaborative and supportive than one which is competitive and individualistic (Colbeck, Cabrera, & Terenzini, 2000; Hirschy & Wilson, 2000; Sánchez, 2000). Faculty should seek to employ a variety of teaching methods that cater to the various learning styles of diverse student groups. For African American male students such techniques might include one-on-one assistance from faculty in class, collaborative learning in which students work together on projects and assignments, and open classroom discussion where students can respectfully challenge subject matter information shared by faculty and other students.

One final note on practical implications revolves around the ability of the participants to reverse the effects of negative stereotyping and use them as motivation to succeed. Community college administrators may need to consider ways to involve African American male students in activities that highlight successful African American males within the community and beyond. These highlights might include opportunities for the students to interact with these successful men. These interactions would be opportunities for these

successful men to share how they were able to overcome adverse circumstances that included particularly negative racial stereotyping which could have caused them to be incarcerated, otherwise dependent upon government support or ended in an early death. These types of activities might serve as inspiration for African American male community college students struggling with racial stereotyping and other negative life issues.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

There are numerous opportunities for further research regarding the experiences and persistence of African American male students in community college. However, based upon the results of this research project, there are four significant recommendations that emerge for further research.

The first recommendation is further research that focuses on African American male community college students who did not persist in their program of study. The purpose of such research would be to explore and understand their experiences in community college and the impact of institutional and external environmental factors on their decisions regarding departure. One approach to this research would be to compare and contrast experiences of persisters and non-persisters.

The second recommendation is to extend similar research to other geographical locations. It would also be of value to investigate the experiences of African American male community college students in another geographic region of the U.S., since their experiences might differ from those of this Southeastern region. The state in which this study was conducted mandated that each community college establish a minority male mentoring



program. Other states might not have such a mandate and experiences of African American male community college students might differ significantly. Further research in this area might expand our knowledge and understanding of the experiences of African American male students and of how community colleges might increase the academic success and persistence of this group of students.

The third recommendation for further research is to explore the effectiveness of program initiatives, such as minority male mentoring programs, designed to facilitate African American male student academic success in community colleges. Research of this nature would involve the examination of these program initiatives through the eyes of program directors, senior administrators and faculty. This research might also involve the examination of the impact of these initiatives on the academic success of African American male participants in the form of grades, time to completion, and graduation rates. Expanded research of this type could provide insight into program weaknesses and strengths, leading to necessary changes and enhancements that facilitate the academic success of African American male community college students. Finally, the views of the program participants themselves would be worth exploring to ascertain their perceptions of program effectiveness on enhancing their educational experience.

The fourth recommendation for further research is regarding Critical Race Theory focusing on the particular tenet of challenging the dominant ideology. Heretofore the focus of this tenet has been the examination of the not so obvious policies, practices, and procedures that continue to be detrimental to the socio-economic upward movement of

African Americans as well as other groups of people of color. Further research would examine other ways in which the dominant ideology might be challenged including the effects of accentuating the positive attributes and contributions to society of people of color. Further research might also examine the notion of personal agendas that challenge dominant ideology, such as the determination of this study's participants' to prove society wrong. Research in this area could open new avenues for challenging dominant thought concerning African Americans, African American males and other people of color.

The fifth and final recommendation for further research focuses on the importance of familial influence on the academic success and persistence of African American male students in community college and community college students generally. Extended knowledge in this area could impact how community colleges involve families in the academic success of African American males and other students. Research would involve investigating how community colleges are currently involving families and what impact that involvement has on persistence as well as research on model programs that currently exist.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a summary of the qualitative study, discussed the three major conclusions that emerged, and offered implications for theory and practice as well as recommendations for further research. The first conclusion noted the importance of family and institutional support to the academic success of the African American male participants. The second conclusion determined that there was evidence of racist attitudes at each of the community colleges in the study. The third and final conclusion noted that the study

participants were able to use the negative societal stereotype discourse about African American males as motivation to strive for academic success. Each conclusion was supported by the literature and this research.

In addition, this study outlined and discussed implications for theory and practice as well as recommendations for further research. Implications for theory included those for Critical Race Theory and student persistence theory. Implications for practice concerned considerations for mentoring programs, enhanced social and cultural activities, family involvement in students' academic endeavors and activities to counteract negative stereotypes. Finally, recommendations for further research focused on the experiences of non-persisters, differences in experiences based upon geographical location, the effectiveness of community college African American male success programs, expansion of the concept of challenging the dominant ideology, and further exploration of familial influence on community college student persistence generally and African American male students specifically.

On a final note, the participants in this study are to be commended for their strong desire to succeed, not only academically, but in life generally. Each has a positive self-concept and is working diligently toward specific life goals in spite of the various obstacles they face and responsibilities they shoulder. Their tenacity and commitment are testimonies to what it really is to be a strong African American male in today's U.S. society.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Letter of Introduction

Talbert Myers            137 Line Drive, Raleigh, NC 27603            (919) 773-3726

First Name, Last Name  
Community College  
Street Address  
City, State Zip Code

Dear Sir/Madam:

Greetings, I am Talbert Myers a doctoral student at North Carolina State University studying the experiences of African American male students in community colleges. I am particularly interested in how those experiences factor into their decision to persist from semester to semester. I have twenty-nine years of experience in various positions within the North Carolina Community College System, and am currently employed as the Vice President of Continuing Education at Johnston Community College.

My study necessitates the participation of African American male degree students who are currently enrolled and have completed at least one semester with no stop-outs between semesters. The study design is qualitative and will involve in-depth interviews of participants for a description of their experiences on the college campus. Additionally, I may wish to observe participants around campus outside of the classroom setting. I am also interested in examining various institutional documents to include program brochures, institutional policies and procedures as well as some budget allocation information.

As the researcher and principal investigator, I am requesting permission to conduct the above research project on your college campus. Your permission would give me access to five to six African American male students to participate in individual interview sessions and to be observed on campus outside of the classroom setting. Granting your permission would also give me access to institutional documents that relate directly or indirectly to the experiences of African American male students on your campus. Participant identity will be kept strictly confidential and no information gathered will in any way be linked to any particular participant or to you college specifically. I am also requesting the names and contact

information of one or two individuals employed at your institution who might serve as “gatekeepers” to assist me in identifying potential participants for my study (see attached form).

Research results in the aggregate will be shared with your institution. There are no anticipated direct benefits to participants or the institution. Indirect benefits may result if knowledge that is gained influences policies and/or procedures that affect persistence of African American males at community colleges in a positive manner.

I appreciate your consideration of my request and look forward to hearing from you soon. I am available for a face-to-face meeting at your request to address any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX B: Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Participant Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Age \_\_\_\_\_

2. Marital Status:

Married: \_\_\_\_\_ Divorced: \_\_\_\_\_ Widower: \_\_\_\_\_ Single: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Number of dependent children in the home: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of other dependent family members in the home \_\_\_\_\_

4. Employment Status:

Employed part time (<20 hrs./wk.) \_\_\_\_\_

Employed part time (>= 20 hrs./wk.) \_\_\_\_\_

Fulltime \_\_\_\_\_

Unemployed \_\_\_\_\_

5. Enrollment Status:

Number of credits completed \_\_\_\_\_

Part time \_\_\_\_\_ Fulltime \_\_\_\_\_

Cumulative GPA \_\_\_\_\_

Program Type (eg. vocational, college transfer, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

6. Social Engagement:

Campus Club Membership \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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Other Campus Social Involvement\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form

### North Carolina State University INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study *The Persistence of African American Male Students in Community Colleges*

Principal Investigator *Talbert Myers*

Faculty Sponsor *Leila Gonzalez-Sullivan*

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#### **What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the experiences of African American male students in community colleges and to discover the factors leading them to persist in their college studies.

#### **What will happen if you take part in the study?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an in depth interview about your experiences at your community college. The initial interview should last no longer than one and one half hour. There may be one follow-up interview of approximately 30 minutes. The interviews will be recorded digitally which will be connected to you only by an assigned code name. You will be observed by the principal investigator as you interact with fellow students, faculty and staff in on-campus settings outside of the classroom such as the library, student lounge, etc.

#### **Risks**

Participants will reflect on their experiences that might potentially cause slight discomfort; however, this risk is very minimal. Minimal risk refers to risks that are no greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. As the principal investigator, I will ensure that information shared will in no way be reported such that would reveal participant identities. Participants will be identified by pseudonyms or code name.

#### **Benefits**

There are no direct benefits to participants other than possible personal insights. Indirect benefits may result if knowledge that is gained influences policies and/or procedures that affect persistence of African-American males at community colleges in a positive manner.

#### **Confidentiality**

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in the principal investigator's home office. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. Audio recordings will be destroyed seven years after the completion of the research study.



**Compensation**

You will not receive anything for participating.

**What if you have questions about this study?**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Talbert Myers at [t\\_myers@johnstoncc.edu](mailto:t_myers@johnstoncc.edu) or (919) 773-3726 9 (home); (919) 539-9699 (cell).

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

**Consent To Participate**

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

**Subject's signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Investigator's signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D: Interview Protocol

### Interview Protocol

#### Background/Opening Question:

- Tell me a little about your life growing up.
  1. Family background
  2. Early school experiences
- Tell me about your academic choices since high school.
  1. What did you do after high school?
- How did you decide upon attending a community college?
  1. Had you applied to other colleges or universities?
  2. Had you considered other programs?

#### Research Question #1: What are the experiences of African American male students in community college?

- Describe your experiences during the admissions process of your enrollment here at the college.
  1. Who did you encounter during this process?
  2. How did those encounters shape your outlook about being in a community college?
- Share your experiences about what it is like to be in a community college classroom.
  1. What do you like about being in class?
  2. What do you not like about being in class?
  3. Please share a story (or time) when you felt supported as an African American male student.
  4. Please share a story (or time) when you did not feel supported as an African American male student.
  5. Overall, how would you describe your interactions with faculty?
  6. Overall, how would you describe your interactions with students?
  7. Please include any situations that made you uncomfortable.

- What have been your experiences outside of the classroom (e.g., faculty, staff, administrators and other students)?
  1. What do you like about the campus environment outside of the classroom setting?
  2. What do you not like about the campus environment outside of the classroom setting?
  3. Describe your interactions with other students outside of the classroom setting.
  4. Describe your interactions with faculty, staff and administrators outside of the classroom setting.

Research Question #2: How do personal, social and environmental factors affect the persistence of African American male students in community college?

- Will you please describe for me a typical day for you when you are not on campus attending class?
  1. How are your off-campus weekdays different from weekends?
  2. Please describe any community or social organizations of which you are a member or participant (formal or informal).
- How would you describe society's view of you as an African American male and how has that influenced your experiences here at the college?
- Can you describe any environmental influences, either at the college or outside the college, that have influenced your time here at the college?
  1. Who would you say within the college community supports your educational endeavor most? Why?
  2. Who would you say supports your educational endeavor most aside from anyone in the college community? Why?
  3. Can you describe any activities or personal responsibilities outside of the college that have positively influenced your college experience?
  4. Can you describe any activities or personal responsibilities outside of the college that have negatively influenced your college experience?
  5. Please describe any activities within the college community that have positively influenced your college experience.
  6. Please describe any activities within the college community that have negatively influenced your college experience.

Research Question #3: What enhances the semester to semester persistence of African American male students in community college?

- Will you please describe any traditions here at the college that makes you feel especially comfortable as an African American male student?
  1. Describe any annual activity or event that particularly helps you feel that you fit in here at the college.
  2. Describe any college activities or events that occur each semester that help you in your studies.
  
- Can you tell me of any college guidelines or procedures that are helping you, and of any resources that make your college experience positive?
  1. Can you describe any particular rules or procedures that help you as an African American male student?
  2. Describe any resources (special programs, persons) that have made your educational experiences at the college better.

Research Question #4: What detracts from the semester to semester persistence of African American male students in community colleges?

- Will you describe any traditions here at the college that makes you feel uncomfortable as an African American male student?
  1. Describe any annual activity or event that particularly made you feel that you don't fit here at the college.
  2. Describe any college activities or events that occur each semester that interfere with your studies.
  
- Can you tell me of any college guidelines or procedures that hinder you, and of any resources that are not available that could make your college experience positive?
  1. Can you describe any particular rules or procedures that hinder you as an African American male student?
  2. Describe any resources (special programs, positions) that, if available, could make your college experiences better.
  3. Is there anything else you would add about things that detract from your experiences here at the college or inhibit your studies and academic progress?

APPENDIX E: Observation Guide

Observation Guide-Campus Interactions Outside Classroom

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

**Group Description (race/ethnicity, age, gender):** Brief description of persons interacting with the research study participant. Are there persons of different races/ethnicities gender and/or age? Are students and faculty/staff present?

**Verbal Behavior and Interactions:** Who speaks to whom and for how long; who initiates interaction; tone of voice (condescending, supportive, etc.) of those interacting? What are the dynamics of the interaction?

**Physical Behavior and Gestures:** What people do, who interacts directly with research study participant? Any noticeable body language and if so what does it appear to indicate in terms of attitude?

**Human Traffic:** Do others enter vicinity and join group? Any reaction to research study participant as a part of group? Do they stay or leave after a short time? Who are they (race/ethnicity, gender, age)?

The above areas will guide field note documentation during participant observation. Field notes will be taken in a field notebook. In addition to the above areas researcher response comments to what is observed will be recorded in field notebook.

APPENDIX F: Document Analysis Guide

**Document Analysis Guide**

This document will be used by the researcher to ascertain information about Community College. This includes budget information, policies, annual reports, brochures, mailers and other marketing materials used by Community College.

Document Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Reviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Brief summary of document contents

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2. Origin of the document (why was it created?). \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Significance of the document \_\_\_\_\_

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4. Other sources dealing with this subject

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

d. \_\_\_\_\_

5. Corroboration or contradiction of other sources with this document.

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