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Persistence of 1st-Year African American Male Students at a Community College in a Southeastern State

Mark Coleman
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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Mark Coleman

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Persistence of 1st-Year African American Male Students at a Community College

in a Southeastern State

by

Mark Coleman

MA, University of Phoenix, 2006

BS, Pembroke State University, 1994

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

November 2024

Abstract

The problem investigated in this study was the lack of persistence of 1st-year African American male students at a community college in a southeastern state. In the fall of 2018, only 55% of African American male students progressed through their 1st year compared to 70% of White male students. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of 1st-year African American male students that contribute to their decisions to persist at a community college in a southeastern state. The conceptual framework for this study was Tinto's theory of student departure, which addresses how students are integrated into the academic and social systems within their institution. For this basic qualitative design, semistructured interviews were conducted with eleven 1st-year African American male students who had persisted beyond their 1st year at a community college. Data analysis revealed themes that influence persistence, such as family and community support (parents and children), self-efficacy (converting negatives to positives), academic factors (tutoring and student mentoring), perceptions of the community college (affordability and academic preparation), academic barriers (writing and test anxiety), and personal barriers (time management and procrastination). Recommendations for future research included incorporating geographical diversity and conducting longitudinal studies that would enhance the generalizability of findings. In the context of social change, the findings from this study may assist community college leaders with developing targeted interventions that prioritize African American males' persistence, foster their personal growth, and lead to better career opportunities.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the cherished memories of Ms. Chris and Larry, whose guidance and support were invaluable throughout my academic journey. Their unwavering encouragement and belief in my potential have left an indelible mark on my heart and mind. Though they are no longer with us, their spirits inspire and motivate me daily. I am deeply grateful for their shared wisdom and kindness, which have profoundly influenced my work and life. This dedication honors their legacy and profoundly impacts my pursuit of knowledge and excellence.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background	2
Problem Statement	3
Purpose of the Study	4
Research Question	5
Conceptual Framework.....	5
Nature of the Study	5
Definitions.....	7
Assumptions.....	7
Scope and Delimitations	8
Limitations	8
Significance.....	10
Summary	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review	12
Literature Search Strategy.....	13
Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation	14
Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts.....	17
History of Community Colleges	17
Defining Community College.....	18
Community College Student Profile.....	19

Early Experiences of African American Males in Education.....	20
School-to-Prison Pipeline	22
Alternatives to Punishment.....	23
Remedial Education.....	25
Black Men and Community Colleges.....	25
Persistence of the African American Male College Student	27
Contributing Factors to College Persistence.....	29
Academic Factors.....	30
Cocurricular Factors.....	31
Environmental Factors.....	32
Socioeconomic Status and Economic Factors	33
Academic and Environmental Support	34
Academic Support.....	35
Environmental Support.....	36
African American Male College Mentoring.....	37
Summary and Conclusions	39
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	40
Research Design and Rationale	40
Role of the Researcher	41
Methodology.....	42
Participant Selection	43
Instrumentation	43

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection.....	44
Data Analysis Plan.....	45
Trustworthiness.....	46
Credibility.....	46
Transferability.....	47
Dependability.....	47
Confirmability.....	48
Ethical Procedures.....	48
Summary.....	49
Chapter 4: Results.....	51
Setting.....	51
Data Collection.....	53
Data Analysis.....	55
Results.....	59
Factors That Influenced Decisions to Persist.....	60
Barriers That Influence Student Persistence.....	68
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	73
Transferability.....	74
Dependability.....	75
Confirmability.....	76
Summary.....	76
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	78

Interpretation of the Findings.....	78
Findings and the Literature	78
Conceptual Framework.....	87
Limitations of the Study.....	88
Recommendations.....	89
Implications.....	90
Conclusion	91
References.....	94
Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer.....	114
Appendix B: Interview Protocol	115

List of Tables

Table 1. Demographic Information.....	53
Table 2. Initial Codes From Transcripts	57
Table 3. Final Code Structure	59

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

African American men are more likely to attend community colleges than 4-year institutions because of open access and affordability (Ingram & Coaxum, 2018). However, a growing body of research has shown that, for community college students in general and Black male students in particular, a lack of persistence can result in a lack of student achievement (Ingram & Coaxum, 2018). The persistence of community college students is a serious and perennial concern, and students and institutions face different challenges along their paths to college completion (Hatch & Garcia, 2017). African American male students have the lowest degree of attainment than their White male counterparts of other races due to various complex barriers (Young, 2020). Prior educational experiences, feeling rejected and unwelcome in the classroom, low teacher expectations, and conflicting job and school obligations are some barriers preventing students from completing their degrees (Young, 2020). Exploring African American male persistence is crucial because it can provide knowledge on how to raise the success rate of African American male students in community colleges. This study may promote positive social change for African American male students by informing efforts to increase their persistence at the community college, enable them to become more financially independent and support them in becoming productive workers once they graduate.

Chapter 1 will focus on the 1st-year persistence of African American male students at a local community college in southeastern North Carolina. Chapter 1 will also

include the study's problem, purpose, research question, conceptual framework, nature, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance.

Background

According to national data, there is a difference between students who are Black and their counterparts of other races in terms of graduation rates (Banks & Dohy, 2019). According to data from 4-year colleges, Hispanic students had a higher graduation rate (55%) than African American students (45.9%; Shapiro et al., 2017). Shapiro et al. (2017) assert that Black male students enrolled in 4-year public institutions had the lowest completion rate (40.0%) and the highest stop-out percentage (41.1%). Shapiro et al., also reveals that completing college provides several advantages for both people and society. These advantages include increased work satisfaction, civic participation, individual labor market access, national economic growth, and global competitiveness.

Two-year institutions also struggle with the persistence of Black males in college. The 1st-year persistence and retention rate at 2-year public institutions for the Fall 2017 entering cohort was 55.3% for Black students and 67.1% for White students (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). The North Carolina Community College Dashboard highlights that the community college system has seen a continuous trend of decreasing persistence rates among Black males, which signals a gap in practice. In the fall of 2015, Black males' 1st-year progression/persistence rate was 50% compared to White males at 66%. In the fall of 2016, the persistence rate for Black males was 51% compared to White males at 67%. In the fall of 2017, the persistence rate was 52% for Black males and 67% for White males. In the fall of 2019, the persistence rate was 55%

for Black males and 70% for White males (North Carolina Community College Dashboard). The gap in practice was the lack of understanding of the 1st-year persistence of African American males at the community college. This study provides insight into the experiences of African American males that will inform practice and may assist with increasing persistence rates among African American males in community colleges.

Problem Statement

The problem that was investigated in this study is the lack of persistence of 1st-year African American male students at a community college in a southeastern state. The gap in practice is that limited initiatives target the persistence of 1st-year African American males at the local study site. This gap is inconsistent with research by Beale et al. (2019), who contended that, for example, having a mentor for Black male students can increase college persistence. In addition, research gaps exist on Black male student success strategies to improve persistence (Wilson, 2021). There is a 15% difference in the 1st-year persistence of African American male students compared to White male students in the North Carolina community college system. As of Fall 2018, 55% of African American men progressed through their 1st year of college, while White men showed a 70% progression rate. Ingram and Coaxum (2018) stated that 17% of African American men will complete their goals in 3 years, while 27% of their White male counterparts will have completed their goals in the same time span. In addition, African American men enrolled in community college do not complete their studies; in fact, Black men who enter community colleges will complete at a rate of 16.9% compared to 25.5% of White men (Turner, 2020). Wood and Harris (2017) asserted that 32% of Black males will

complete their goals at a community college in 6 years compared to 40% of White males. These data are essential because they reveal the need for community colleges to support African American males during their 1st year in community college.

At Hilltop Community College (HCC), a pseudonym, from 2018 to 2020, African American males persisted in the 1st year at lower rates than their White male counterparts (North Carolina Community College Dashboard, n.d.). In the fall of 2018, 44% of the African American males enrolled at HCC progressed through the 1st year compared to 78% of White males. In the fall of 2019, 41% of African American males progressed through the 1st year compared to 80% of White males at HCC. In the fall of 2020, less than 20% of African American males progressed in their 1st year compared to 74% of their White male counterparts at HCC.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the experiences of 1st-year African American male students that contribute to their decisions to persist at a community college in a southeastern state. The paradigm connected to this investigation was social constructionism. Theoretically, knowledge is created by interactions between humans and the environment (Nickerson, 2021). Therefore, rather than being a result of objective observation, a person's perception of the truth results from social processes and the interactions that person is having. This study provided insight into the experiences contributing to 1st-year African American male students' persistence. Semistructured interviews were conducted to learn more about 1st-year African American male students' experiences that influenced their decisions to continue their education at a community

college. Eleven African American males took part in this study. African American male community college students' firsthand accounts of the events that helped them successfully persist over the 1st year were utilized to gather information for strategic planning, policy creation, and program development related to persistence and completion activities.

Research Question

The following research question guided this research study: What are the experiences of 1st-year African American male students that contribute to their decisions to persist at a community college in a southeastern state?

Conceptual Framework

The logical connections between the conceptual framework presented in the study lie in Tinto's model of student departure, which consists of academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and the inability to integrate themselves into the institution's social and intellectual life, through either adoption or rejection (Nicoletti, 2019). Students actively involved in campus activities are more consistent in their academic performance and personal psychosocial development (Rahman et al., 2020). Thus, using Tinto's model of student departure and examining student involvement allowed for connections between African American students who persist/progress beyond their 1st year.

Nature of the Study

This research is a fundamental qualitative study in nature. Ravitch and Carl (2016), contends that the foundation of qualitative research is comprehending attitudes,

beliefs, and perceptions through the insights of others. Using a qualitative approach provided insight into the 1st-year persistence of African American male students at a community college in the southeast. Qualitative approaches, in general, are techniques that produce qualitative data, such as unstructured, open-ended interviews and participant observations (Burkholder et al., 2016). Adhabi and Anozie (2017) asserted that the mainstay of primary data gathering in qualitative research design is interviews. Individuals create learning through their interactions, and a basic qualitative design is used to develop knowledge through the intricacies of human experiences.

When trying to find a solution, bring about change, or pinpoint pertinent topics, basic qualitative research is recommended (Mihas, 2019). Therefore, conducting interviews allowed the participants to share openly their perspectives on what helped them persist beyond their 1st year in college. African American male students were asked to explain their perceptions of their decisions to persist beyond the 1st year at a community college in a southeastern state. Semistructured interviews allowed the participants to expand on information critical to their persistence. Probing questions were asked to extract essential responses to interview questions. Recorded audio from the interviews was transcribed verbatim. Using NVivo software, each interview transcript was analyzed and categorized into overall patterns. Any data collected were analyzed in relation to the research question. To address the gap in research on the 1st-year persistence of African American male students, the results of this study were added to the limited research and strengthened current knowledge. In addition, it provided

recommendations for future research on the 1st-year persistence of Black males at the community college.

Definitions

The following definitions are listed to avoid ambiguity, as some of the terms may have several meanings:

African American or *Black*: A person who has origins in any Black racial group of Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

Community college: A community college (also known as a junior college) is a higher education institution that provides a 2-year curriculum that can lead to an associate's degree (Chen, 2022).

First year: First year is a student's freshman year of college (Stahl, 2019).

Persistence: Continuous, semester-to-semester enrollment in working toward completing a college degree (Martin, 2017).

Assumptions

Assumptions are items that readers would commonly accept as accurate or plausible in research (Barroso, 2018). The topic selected for the study was chosen due to the low rate of African American males' 1st-year persistence compared to that of their White male counterparts. Therefore, the first assumption was that the participants would offer information freely and honestly. The second assumption was that the reasons for student persistence would be similar to those found in similar studies.

Scope and Delimitations

The setting for this study was a community college in the southeast. Many colleges and universities have faced a problem with retention and completion of Black males, and the community college presented in this study was chosen due to its lack of 1st-year persistence of African American males compared to their White male counterparts. The sample size was limited to 10–12 Black male students who persisted beyond their 1st year of college during the 2019–2021 academic years. Because this was a basic qualitative study in which I focused on participants' personal experiences to explain a specific phenomenon based on the data obtained (Turhan, 2019), the recommended sample size was three to 10 participants (Sim et al., 2018). Semistructured interviews were conducted to collect data. Students selected for this study shared the experiences that allowed them to persist beyond their 1st year. Additionally, their experiences provided various perspectives on student persistence compared to previous studies. While this study focused on a community college in the southeast, the participants' descriptions of their persistence experiences were transferable because African American male students who attend 4-year institutions may share similar experiences.

Limitations

Because the study was confined to a small campus, one known limitation was the number of participants for selection and participation. Each fall, beginning in 2015, past curriculum enrollment data showed that the enrollment of African American males varied between 49 and 123 students (NC Community College Dashboard, n.d.). The low

enrollment of African American male students at the local site was a barrier to obtaining participants who met the criteria for the study. To address this limitation, I recruited additional African American males from surrounding community colleges to participate in the study. The second limitation was the scheduling of the interviews. Students at HCC could take online, hybrid, and seated courses. Recruiting applicants and arranging interviews was difficult due to class scheduling conflicts. To address this limitation, I made every effort to be flexible and allowed students to schedule their interviews conveniently.

Qualitative research is an exploratory scientific observational technique for gathering nonnumerical data. Qualitative research involves describing items, associated qualities, meanings, and fundamental observations and interpretations instead of counting and measuring things, as in quantitative analysis. Interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussions are popular methods used in qualitative research. Although academic or scientific research must be handled objectively, the subjective aspect of qualitative research makes it challenging for the researcher to be separated from the data, making it difficult to preserve objectivity and prevent bias. The most well-known bias occurs when a researcher interprets data to support their hypothesis. Information that challenges a researcher's viewpoint may also be ignored (Shah, 2019). To avoid this bias, a researcher should consider all the data obtained and analyze the data clearly and unbiasedly. I reevaluated the responses and ensured that preexisting assumptions were kept at bay. Questions that pointed participants toward likely outcomes could result in biased responses (Shah, 2019). To avoid this bias, I asked simple questions and avoided

words that could introduce bias. In addition, I did not ask leading questions that might elicit a response in favor of a particular assumption.

Significance

This study addresses a local problem by focusing on the experiences of 1st-year students at HCC. This study is unique in that it examined the gap in practice related to the persistence of African American males at HCC. The study advances knowledge in the discipline by providing information that will help with the persistence of African American male students attending community colleges. Understanding African American males' experiences and the factors that contribute to their persistence will provide academic leaders with information that will guide faculty and administration toward making student-centered changes that will increase the persistence of this unique group of students so that they can achieve their educational goals. In the context of social change, the study's findings will provide other academic institutions with valuable knowledge of the experiences that influence 1st-year African American males' persistence decisions, better equipping them to attract and retain students. The findings of this study will help community college leaders consider outreach activities or programs that encourage and support African American men to complete their degrees to promote positive social change. Mentoring, peer groups, and faculty support are examples of such programs.

Furthermore, providing a nurturing environment may motivate African American male students to complete their studies and become positive role models for younger men. Positive role models can include African American male college graduates. African

American male students can inspire young African American boys and men to be the best at whatever they choose to do with their lives.

Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the problem of the 1st-year persistence of African American male students at a community college in a southeastern state. Black males' 1st-year persistence rates are lower than those of White males at large colleges, universities, and community colleges. Chapter 1 also included data on student persistence. The problem addressed in this study was the low 1st-year persistence rate of African American male students. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of 1st-year African American male students that contribute to their decisions to persist at a community college in a southeastern state. In Chapter 2, scholarly and professional literature related to student persistence will be discussed and analyzed to determine what is known and what needs to be explored in future studies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of 1st-year African American male students that contribute to their decisions to persist at a community college in a southeastern state. First, it is crucial to identify barriers to persistence within existing literature in order to understand African American males' ability to persist and advance in community college environments. As a result, before evaluating the literature on positive and negative support measures for persistence, the published literature must be examined for barriers that lead to a deeper understanding of how obstacles before and after entering community college play a significant role in the experience of Black men. Second, this research addresses research on individual and organizational approaches that researchers have studied as supporting mechanisms for African American male students who remained continuously enrolled in community college to achieve a degree. Finally, in Chapter 2, I explain the importance of learning more about Black male students' educational achievements.

African American students face many challenges that hinder them from earning community college degrees. Aside from previous educational experiences, other barriers include disconnection in the learning environment triggered by restricted teacher expectations regarding their success and a conflicting duty to work (Young, 2020). Researchers have also established a noninclusive learning environment as a barrier to degree attainment for Black males (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Goings, 2017). Obstacles to these students' academic performance may begin as early as infancy, resulting in poor early educational and damaging adult results linked to their first classroom experiences

(Wesley & Ellis, 2017). In a study by Dulabaum (2016), students proposed overcoming obstacles by strengthening interactions with professors, teachers, counselors, tutors, and other staff members. Dulabaum stated that students seek further help with organizational and administrative processes and motivation, guidance, and coaching inside and outside the classroom.

Chapter 2 will highlight barriers to persistence specific to African American Males as well as the historical context of community colleges. The study's conceptual framework, which draws on Tinto's departure theory, will also be outlined in this chapter. Lastly, barriers and supports and the effect of organizational culture on African American community college students' educational experiences will be discussed.

Literature Search Strategy

The following databases and search engines were searched to identify prospective, peer-reviewed articles and books: EBSCO, Google Scholar, NCLive, ERIC, ProQuest Dissertations, and Theses Global, and SAGE Journals. I used Boolean operators AND/OR to optimize the results. Abstracts were used to judge an article's relevance to the research questions. To assist in my search, I used keywords such as *African Americans and college*, *college and the African American male*, *Black males and higher education*, *African American males and the community college*, *Black males and college enrollment*, *African American males at predominantly White colleges and universities*, *African American males at historically Black colleges and universities*, and *African American males and college readiness*.

The search strategy included locating research on African Americans and college persistence. First, I read abstracts to determine if the articles had relevant vital points. Then, if I found pertinent themes, I placed each article in a file for future reference and searched for more articles. I also used Feedly, which provided recent articles on higher education. Finally, Google Scholar provided many articles from various sources revealing the persistence and retention of African American males in higher education. In addition to peer-reviewed articles, Strayhorn (2017) and Ingram and Coaxum (2018) represented a few researchers who conducted research similar to my study.

Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Tinto's theory of student departure. Tinto (1988) contended that the higher a student's dedication to the school and the aim of college graduation, the more likely they are to stay in college. As the institution's priorities shift, ways to foster institutional commitment must also be readily accessible. Faculty and staff must continue to focus on the institution's position in providing an atmosphere more or less conducive to student success. There are direct links between college student achievement and faculty and staff support. The original Tinto theory, established in 1975, emphasized integrating students into the college environment to exclude important external factors on students such as family, employment, and culture. Tinto introduced financial capital and the role of the student's environment outside of the institution's educational decisions as relevant considerations in a 1993 revision (Schuh et al., 2017; Tinto, 1988). The institution's approach to recognizing and encouraging students' growth as they transition to college became a primary focus.

Tinto's theory of student departure (1975, 1988, 1998) offered a basis for investigating community college student persistence. Tinto's theory describes how a student's campus experiences, including academic and social systems, influence the student's persistence. As students progress through the stages, they experience new levels of engagement and knowledge of the college community. Students' ability to tolerate and cope with separation and change in pursuing education is influenced by their personality type, educational goals, and commitments.

Both previous and current experiences influence students' reactions to college. Tinto expanded his initial hypothesis in 1993 by including the phases of institutional exit (Tinto, 1998). Through this revision, Tinto's (1998) stages acted as a form of transition from youthful contact to adult membership in society. Tinto reviewed Van Gennep's (1960) rites of passage to adulthood, which defined three stages—separation, transformation, and integration—and described patterns of change in how a person and others in society interact. Separation represented the end of previous relationships. The second stage is the transition, which happens when a person starts to communicate and behave in new ways to gain acceptance into a new community (Tinto, 1998). Incorporation is the third and final step. This stage entails the participant adopting new patterns of interaction as a member of the community, which is mirrored by a reciprocal member (Tinto, 1998).

Van Gennep's (1960) approach to understanding how students automatically become new group members, similar to how college students adapt to college environments, is appropriate for this stage. Likewise, Tinto (1998) theorized that these

three essential passages must be experienced and considered for students to complete their program; the parallels provided a framework for establishing or recognizing the procedure of institutional persistence as separation, transfer, and integration.

The first stage of a college career, separation, signifies a break from previous cultures, typically from high school. Students change by rejecting attitudes and standards required to accept habits in the new college setting. The transition passage aims to transform; it is time to reflect on past community associations while anticipating new ones (Tinto, 1988). Intentional attention is necessary to support this adjustment to help students adapt to stress and change, which may help them avoid dropping out of college (Tinto, 1988).

Tinto's (1975, 1988) contributions, which clarified how college students process change and construct new communication methods, helped promote African American male students' persistence in community colleges. Tinto's analysis was combined with that of Braxton et al. (2004), as cited in Xu and Webber's (2018) research, to see if an integration model of persistence was beneficial and helpful for students of various racial backgrounds. In addition to academic excellence, Black student retention can be strengthened using readily available institutional interventions such as faculty support and instruction (Xu & Webber, 2018). The introduction of social involvement initiatives that encourage positive communication about the value of job-related college degrees and financial prospects can also prove to be valuable.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

History of Community Colleges

In 1947, President Harry Truman commissioned the study “Higher Education for Democracy.” The federal government vowed to pay for college for any returning soldier who qualified under the G.I. Bill, and the veterans’ reaction soon mirrored the drastic rise in college opportunities. By making college a viable option for veterans from various backgrounds, the G.I. Bill has promoted postwar prosperity, expanded the middle class, and democratized higher education in the United States (O’Brien, 2021). The Truman Commission recognized the need for a substantial investment in higher education to achieve the nation’s goals (Legon, 2019). It can be noted that the Truman Commission believed that students should have a strong foundation in general education, that college teaching should be upgraded to prepare this new generation of students better, and that higher education should be affordable to all.

The Truman Report outlined the Truman Administration’s vision for community colleges. According to the committee, the activity of colleges and universities can lead to “social problem solving,” “a deeper manifestation of democracy,” and “international understanding and cooperation” (Ris, 2022, p. 17). To achieve those objectives, it proposed a massive expansion of college access, including eliminating all tuition and fees for the first 2 years of undergraduate education and constructing hundreds of new schools around the country (Ris, 2022). The Commission also desired those 2-year institutions to be wholly incorporated into the life of their towns; hence, the name “community college” was preferred over “junior college” (p. 23). Overall, the Truman Report outlined how

community colleges would serve the people who attend them and how these institutions would continue to provide students with the knowledge and skills to compete in the labor market.

The Truman Commission report addressed the eradication of discriminatory practices against Blacks, women, and Jews and the growth of scholarship and fellowship possibilities to alleviate the financial challenges of attending college to expand access and enrollment in college. However, the poor educational achievement of Black adult's results from a lengthy period of uneven opportunities (Zook, 1947). Low family income and escalating school prices create an almost insurmountable barrier to higher education for many young people (Zook, 1947). Even though community colleges sprang out of that directive, improvement has not been as widespread as intended. Bratton (2018) highlighted that continued difficulties have harmed African American males' retention and graduation from higher education.

Defining Community College

Community colleges are known by various titles, including *technical colleges*, *junior colleges*, *vocational institutions*, and *2-year institutions* (O'Banion, 2019). The community college's historic aim has been to give students access to higher education (Bratton, 2018). These institutions are essential in providing occupational education, remedial and developmental education, and other educational services (Dougherty et al., 2017). Burrows (2021) stated that the benefits of attending a community college include saving money by attending a community college for 2 years and then transferring to a 4-year institution. Community colleges emphasize the character and diversity of the local

communities (Bratton, 2018). Other goals of community colleges were highlighted by Moss (2019) as follows:

- associate's degree programs in a variety of occupational subjects that also count toward transfer credit
- terminal occupational certification and associate-level credentialing that are immediately useful in the workplace but do not grant transfer credit
- noncredit instruction, such as literacy training and English as a second language
- contract training for local businesses and employers
- remedial and developmental instruction to make students college ready

The community must create the course options and academic master plan for these missions to be realized.

Community College Student Profile

Higher education budgets, wages, and strategies are all determined by enrollment estimates. Nontraditional students make up most of today's traditional college students, particularly in community institutions (Glenn, 2020). In the Fall of 2018, over half of the students (47%) were enrolled in noncredit courses (Sanchez, 2020). Community colleges enrolled 41% of all students in the United States in the Fall of 2018 (Sanchez, 2020). In addition, community colleges' open-door admission practices have allowed students from all socioeconomic backgrounds to attend their campuses.

The demographics of community college students differ from those of typical college students. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2017)

completed a report on the historical trends in community college enrollment. The AACC (2017) stated that most community college students (18 to 21 years old) are traditional college students. This group of students is the only age group for which full-time enrollment exceeds part-time enrollment. According to the report, female enrollment in community colleges has surpassed male enrollment. The AACC (2017) also highlighted that the rate of first-time community college students who are White had decreased from 61% in 2001 to 43% in 2017. During the same period, the percentage of Hispanic first-time students nearly doubled and now accounts for more than a quarter (27%) of all students who begin in community colleges. It was also noted that the proportion of Black first-time students has consistently been higher than their representation in total enrollment. In other words, Black students are more likely to be first-generation than returning community college students.

Early Experiences of African American Males in Education

Today's African American males encounter many obstacles that jeopardize their academic performance (Husband & Kang, 2020). Research has shown that African American male learners face hurdles to academic progression as early as elementary school (Emetu, 2020). There is an increasing difference in dropout rates and achievement outcomes between African American male students and other student populations, such as White and Asian male students (Husband & Kang, 2020). Stereotyping of African Americans, particularly males, has negatively influenced African American families and communities throughout history in the United States. Negative stereotypes about African American men in the media impact their self-esteem, academic confidence, and how

other students and instructors on campus perceive them (Brown & Sacco-Bene, 2018). Many African American males, for example, have been portrayed as stupid, violent, and dangerous criminals (Taylor et al., 2019). Teachers see African American school students as more hyperactive, immature, impulsive, and aggressive (Taylor et al., 2019). They make improper referrals to special education because of cultural differences being mistaken for cognitive and behavioral problems. African American boys are more likely than any other group to be placed in special education classrooms. However, there is also a disconnect regarding the authority figures in their classes. Lynch (2017) asserts that the K–12 teaching profession is dominated by White women, many of whom are well-trained and eager to help all students succeed but lack the firsthand experience necessary to connect with African American male pupils.

Reading underachievement among African American males contributes to many of their bad educational experiences. Historically, educating most African American males to read has been difficult in the United States (Kunjufu, 2019). While Black pupils fall behind in reading by fourth grade compared to White students, the gap widens significantly for African American and male students (Thomas, 2018). The disparity is due to African American males' discipline rates. Suspension rates and reading achievement are closely related (Martin, 2017). Martin (2017) found that African American males suspended from school had lower reading achievement than disciplined pupils. African American males remain among the most socially and academically excluded student groups (Hattar, 2018). Due to high suspension and expulsion rates, African American boys' success levels may remain lower than those of their White peers.

Martin (2017) identified three areas for development in African American boys' reading. The first is a complete school transformation. Educational institutions make every effort to keep African American males in school, particularly during reading instruction. However, as previously noted, when African American male youths are suspended from school, they lag because they do not participate in reading activities. Current conduct regulations should be reviewed to see if there are any strategies to keep more African American male children in school rather than suspending them (Martin, 2017). Martin (2017) identified two other areas for improvement: the classroom and the curriculum. The recommendation was to increase reading materials and integrate more interactive activities that include the requirements of various student audiences, particularly African American males. Jones (2019) asserted that African American males perform better in learning environments emphasizing interaction, movement, and energy. Suppose instructors are going to meet students where they are. In that case, they must be committed to an unwavering goal of high success and the everyday effort of responding to students' particular needs in a way that promotes optimal growth.

School-to-Prison Pipeline

The school-to-prison pipeline is a system in which pupils are forced out of school due to disciplinary rules such as "zero-tolerance" and may end up in prison (Farmer, 2021). Pesta (2018) stated that the school-to-prison pipeline is a phenomenon in which there is a link between school policies, practices, and legal actions and an increase in the incarceration rates of former students later in life. The school-to-prison pipeline research focuses on African American males because data from the US Department of Education

and Office of Civil Rights indicated racial disparities in suspension for African Americans and children with disabilities (Wallace, 2017). These disparities are in some cases a result of zero-tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline policies and practices that impede the scholastic and life outcomes of students of color.

The implementation of zero-tolerance regulations aimed to provide a secure and efficient educational setting (Wallace, 2017). The school-to-prison pipeline and zero-tolerance policies are described by critical race and racial threat theories. These theories have shown that racial bias and stereotypes play a direct role in a teacher's decision to discipline kids (Wallace, 2017). Black and Hispanic kids are more likely to be suspended or expelled than White students, and Black and Hispanic Americans are disproportionately represented in the nation's prisons (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021). Completing more years of school, enrolling in a higher-quality school, and graduating from high school lowers subsequent criminal involvement (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021). As a result, children must stay in school to enhance their success results and make schools safer and learning environments more productive for all students.

Alternatives to Punishment

Students have been forced into the prison pipeline due to zero-tolerance policies, which have resulted in racial and gender inequities in applying sanctions. A zero-tolerance policy aims to establish a positive learning environment in the classroom. On the other hand, the school-to-prison pipeline has established a society that prioritizes incarceration over education (Wallace, 2017). Researchers in the social sciences are looking at current school policies and procedures to see how they may better serve

children and encourage restorative justice policies that keep children in school and out of trouble with the law. School discipline is intended to assist pupils in becoming and remaining self-motivated learners. Teachers, students, and parents can sit in a circle and express themselves in a nonjudgmental environment through restorative justice programs like the *whole school* approach. A whole-school approach incorporates skill development into daily interactions and practices through collaborative efforts involving all staff, teachers, families, and children (Goldberg et al., 2019), therefore creating a collaborative environment that can assist with addressing school discipline issues.

Balancing proper discipline with school safety, classroom effectiveness, and positive student results is complex for teachers and administrators worldwide. Many schools use exclusionary discipline, removing kids from the classroom for various offenses by suspending or expelling them (Luster, 2018). Over the last few years, the harmful long-term impacts of zero tolerance have garnered increasing attention, inspiring many schools to shift away from these policies and focus more on social-emotional development, restorative practices, and favorable behavioral treatments (Luster, 2018). While the federal government mandates exclusion for dangerous behaviors like violence, weapon possession, or drug possession, a significant portion of school removals are for nonviolent rules violations like tardiness or behaviors that can be interpreted subjectively, like defiance and disrespect (Jones, 2018). Suspending and expelling children does not help students alter their behavior. Exclusionary punishment is linked to worse academic performance, lower levels of school engagement, greater chance of leaving school before graduating, increasing likelihood of future involvement with the criminal justice system,

and higher levels of school violence and antisocial behavior (Jones, 2018). Many of these punishments are disproportionately imposed on students of color and students with disabilities.

Remedial Education

Historically, community colleges have had a poor reputation. Barrington (2021) stated that many people believe students attend community college because a traditional university rejected them. This preconception is accompanied by the belief that community colleges provide a lower-quality education than traditional universities (Barrington, 2021). While community colleges aim to provide quality education to all students, some students arrive unprepared regardless of their history or financial situation (Jordan, 2020).

Students who enter college unprepared have traditionally faced an “obstacle course” of developmental education requirements (Gaghan et al., 2020). Many students must take developmental reading, writing, and math courses before enrolling in introductory college-level courses (Gaghan et al., 2020). For racial/ethnic minority students, developmental education can serve as a bridge or a barrier to degree completion. African Americans require more developmental education than any other racial/ethnic group.

Black Men and Community Colleges

Historically marginalized and underrepresented in postsecondary education, Black men enroll in postsecondary institutions to find stable jobs, access financial freedom, and give back to their communities (Ingram & Coaxum, 2018). Thomas (2020) posited that

success in higher education may lead to solid and rewarding careers, which is especially important when the economy is in turmoil. For Black males, community college is a real alternative that can set them on the path to social and economic advancement (Ingram & Coaxum, 2018). Community colleges enroll 71% of all Black and Latino men who begin their postsecondary education in public institutions (Wood & Harris, 2017).

While community colleges serve the most diverse student populations due to their open-door policy, higher education officials have viewed them as schools capable of providing terminal postsecondary instruction to the growing number of students who want but cannot obtain a 4-year degree (Boateng, 2020). At a community college, less than a third of Black and Latino men (32% and 30%, respectively) accomplish their goals in 6 years (Wood & Harris, 2017). There is a need to learn more about why Black males drop out of community colleges and why they may take longer to get their degrees. There has been a scarcity of literature focusing on Black males in community colleges or other men of color. In the 1990s, research on the achievement of Black male students in 4-year schools came to the fore, but Black male students attending community colleges were mostly neglected (Clinton, 2019).

Persistence, achievement, and other characteristics that contribute to success are the subject of research on Black men and men of color attending 2-year colleges. Although success is broad, much of the study focuses on characteristics that contribute to or deter degree completion or upward transfer to a four-year institution. Transfer, social stratification, social and academic integration, student demographic background and identity, and variables influencing college choice have been investigated.

Persistence of the African American Male College Student

Meeting the needs of African American males has historically been challenging in terms of accessing higher education, attaining academic success, and/or continuing to graduation as institutions seek to serve the needs of more diverse populations (Bratton, 2018). The difficulties affecting the persistence and retention of Black male students at community colleges are crucial to examine because they represent hurdles to achievement. Additional studies on the persistence and retention of Black male students and their experiences add to their college experiences (Martin, 2017). Certain factors influence the successful college retention of African American students, particularly males. While this study focuses on the persistence of 1st-year students at 2-year colleges, it is essential to have a general understanding of African Americans. Therefore, this section will focus on African American students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs), African American students at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and African American males at community colleges.

Druery and Brooms (2019) asserted that a student's sense of belonging is linked to how they feel valued, which can help them persist and thrive in college. Black men continue to face isolation and alienation on campus, unsupportive teacher relationships, and unfavorable racial stereotypes, which create barriers and obstacles to their persistence and graduation at PWIs (Druery & Brooms, 2019). Discrimination against African American males on campus by particular classes of Whites, such as students, teachers, administration, and staff, played a role in their retention or nonretention (Moss, 2019). Locke (2018) asserted that mainstream America often characterizes African American

males as underprepared, at-risk students from low-income families and inner-city thugs, which negatively impacts their college experiences and sense of belonging. Positive cultural interactions can improve this sense of belonging, though African American males also face barriers at HBCUs.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 states that HBCUs' objective has always been to educate African Americans (Higher Education Act of 1965). Because they attend a school established to educate African Americans, African Americans attending an HBCU are likely to achieve tremendous success and face fewer challenges than their counterparts attending PWIs. HBCUs send a higher proportion of their Black students to graduate school than other institutions. Indeed, many of the top Black chemists who have successful careers in industry and academia are graduates of HBCUs. HBCUs provide a supportive environment, a diverse and encouraging faculty, and purposefully prepare students for PhDs (Widener, 2020). Black students in historically Black campuses stressed a sense of engagement, connection, acceptance, support, and encouragement (Moss, 2019). For African Americans, these factors are missing from the PWIs.

Support systems are critical to the retention of African American males. Richardson et al. (2019) posited that there are barriers to Black males attending HBCUs. Financial support is a barrier to persistence, and Black males are hesitant to ask for or seek assistance while attending an HBCU. Navigating between the demands of their home environment and the rigorous academic requirements of HBCUs are also obstacles to their persistence and retention. Bidirectional interactions with the environment influence the individual, and the environment is influenced by the individual (Johnson,

2020). Overall, parental support appears to be proportional to the student's ability to succeed.

A small but growing body of literature exists on African Americans and their attendance at 2-year community colleges. Only 17% of African American men will complete their goals (e.g., certificate, degree, transfer) in 3 years, whereas 27% of White male counterparts will complete their goals simultaneously (Ingram & Coaxum, 2018). Many African American men are not persisting in community college. Ingram and Coaxum (2018) identified five factors during college that influence student success outcomes for Black males: environmental, institutional, social, noncognitive, and academic. The faculty–student engagement was among the factors identified as a salient factor contributing to the success of African American men attending community college. When these factors are satisfied, they can positively impact student success and retention.

Contributing Factors to College Persistence

A literature review revealed several commonalities influencing African American male students' academic, cocurricular, and environmental success in higher education. First, African American males are reportedly classified as an at-risk population in the educational community, which is a troubling dynamic (Hope, 2018). Second, the incapacity, or lack of institutional reaction, to address the obstacles faced by African American males has been identified as a potential factor in education (Young, 2020). Third, the research literature identifies prior learning experiences and course and class engagement opportunities as academic factors. Fourth, students who participate in cocurricular activities increase their self-efficacy, make friends, better understand others,

become more oriented to campus, make significant gains in critical thinking, improve their resilience and well-being, and develop marketable skills (Lundquist, 2020). Finally, outside of the academic setting, environmental influences influence or support a student's capacity to persist in college. Young (2020) asserted that major environmental factors include finances, family support, employer support (tuition, flextime, work hours), and significant life events such as family problems, childcare shortages, and job demands.

Academic Factors

Many African American males are already academically behind when they arrive on college campuses (Brown & Bene, 2018). To help students succeed, administrators continue to focus on identifying academic aspects. However, academic factors influencing community college success vary greatly. A student's withdrawal from college can be caused partly by forced withdrawal (dismissal) due to insufficient academic performance or poor grades (Tinto, 1975). A high number of dropped classes decreases the likelihood of retention. In North Carolina, Black students have the highest course withdrawal rates and the lowest academic GPA. The experience itself may dissuade students from continuing. Thus, academics are a factor that necessitates calls for interventions and institutional policies and practices to help improve students' outcomes.

A relevant consideration is investigating whether race-related thoughts can emerge as a barrier to students' academic success. Johnston-Guerrero (2017) discovered a close alignment of racial reasoning and analytical thinking regarding multiple perceptions of race and experiences. Racial authority occurs in two dimensions (self and others or experiential or scientific), resulting in different outcomes for studying influential factors

for African American male college students. First, self and others operate as authorities, allowing one's racial authority to be defined. Individual racial authority ownership develops because of racial discrimination. In other cases, racial authority is delegated to peers who have experienced perceived racial discrimination and act as the authority holder because of their experiences. Racial authority is influenced by both experiential and scientific variables, which results in pupils of color depending on specialists for knowledge when they have not yet formed their understanding (Johnston-Guerrero, 2017). These experiences of authority, whether derived from science or scholarship or from the mix of the two, encourage acceptance and interaction with one's racial authority in general (Johnston-Guerrero, 2017).

Cocurricular Factors

Cocurricular activities fit outside the students' formal course of study (Jackson & Bridgstock (2021). Tinto (1975) believed that a student's integration influences a person's decision to stay in college and enter the college's social system. For example, social integration occurs primarily through informal peer group associations, semiformal extracurricular activities, and interactions with teachers and administrative officials at the college (Tinto, 1975). Vaughan (2020) pointed out, citing Tinto, that enhancing student retention involves developing and promoting classroom (curricular) interest. Engagement in the classroom is dependent on faculty-student connections, and it is critical for student retention.

Graduation is the primary goal for most students who enroll in college. Graduation can be challenging for anyone, but it is especially difficult for students of

color. Tolliver and Miller (2018) found four themes among the 11 participants in a study on enhancing African American male graduation rates. These themes were related to their graduation from a 4-year school and why they were successful. Mentoring, sociability, on-campus support, and family and community expectations were discussed. Participants indicated that mentors assisted them in navigating the institution and figuring out college life. These mentors built relationships with students and encouraged them to participate in activities at the university.

Environmental Factors

For African American male students, environmental issues outside the community college appeared to impede degree completion (Young, 2020). For example, these students' ability to continue in college is impeded by financial, family, and work obligations (Young, 2020). In addition, male African American community college students are more likely to be older, begin college later, have dependents, be married, and work while pursuing a degree (Snyder et al., 2019). These external influences will likely sabotage African American male students' efforts to complete their degrees. Harris et al. (2017) evaluated California community colleges to support creating interventions and applying equity targets to increase student retention, enrolment, and completion rates in light of such environmental influences. Their research highlighted the impact of environmental variables on African American males and the need for higher education to address these issues.

Within the community college, environmental factors such as employment experience, transportation issues, family care demands, and life-event stress mold African

American males' academic experiences differently from other students (Harris et al., 2017). Food insecurity, for example, is a significant issue for postsecondary students (Bruening et al., 2017). Furthermore, African American men experience food insecurity at a higher rate than students of other races (Wood & Harris, 2017). In addition, some African American men also encounter transportation issues when it comes to college, which represents an environmental pressure that can interfere with their academic experiences (Wood & Harris, 2017), given the necessity to be in class on time.

Socioeconomic Status and Economic Factors

For the past 4 decades, tuition costs have risen faster than inflation, with financial aid rates failing to keep up (Torres et al., 2019). State cuts in higher education funding during the previous decade have contributed to rapid, significant tuition rises and placed more of the costs of college on students, making it difficult for them to enroll and graduate (Mitchell et al., 2019). These changes have exacerbated racial and economic disparities, as rising tuition can dissuade low-income and minority students from attending college (Mitchell et al., 2019). In addition, financial resources play a factor in low-income students' college enrollment decisions and persistence (Torres et al., 2019). Because of these factors, financial aid cannot keep up with the escalating college tuition rates.

If funding is available to cover college expenditures and tuition, minorities and students of color can continue their education. The Pell Grant is the most well-known government aid program for low-income students (Yuen, 2019). Pell funding is provided exclusively based on financial need, and they have been the single most significant

source of grants for postsecondary education for almost 45 years (Protopsaltis & Parrott, 2017). During the 2017-2018 academic year, the grants helped nearly 7 million low-income students attend college (Yuen, 2019). However, despite evidence that Pell reduces the net tuition price for poor and moderate-income students while increasing enrolment, persistence, and completion rates, Pell Grants currently cover a smaller share of college expenditures (Protopsaltis & Parrott, 2017). As a result, African American males cannot successfully persist in higher education without financial support.

Academic and Environmental Support

In their literature review, Brooms and Davis (2017) discovered additional academic and environmental support opportunities through research on peer relationships, faculty connections, and mentoring. The study outcomes demonstrated that linkages and relationships with other Black male students and mentorship from African American staff members influenced persistence. For example, Brooms and Davis (2017) conducted case studies to show how specific characteristics impacted African American male students' capacity to complete their education while managing obstacles.

Beale et al. (2019) investigated the characteristics of African American male students' college achievement. Despite abundant literature capturing persistence issues, not all African American male college students drop out. African American male students who receive mentoring feel appreciated and more confident in their academic abilities (Burney, 2018). Applying to college and being accepted is significant for someone who never anticipated achieving such a goal. Participants in Beale et al.'s (2017) study

highlighted the internal and external motivators and variables African American men found most effective in pursuing a college degree successfully.

Academic Support

There are strategies to help African American male students succeed academically while in college. Graham (2020) was concerned with making the college campus more welcoming to African American males. It is necessary for instructors to be aware of how their biases and flawed thinking hinder African American male students' future achievement and learning. African American men need to be in classrooms where their teachers support them, and they can openly communicate their anxieties, problems, and concerns. Graham (2020) asserted that when African American men believe their identity, talents, and intellect are not recognized in the learning environment, they are more likely to withdraw from their studies and peers.

Researchers have looked at the power of the human desire to thrive (rather than survive) as a motivator for academic support (Brown et al., 2017). Some researchers have considered the concept of thriving rather than surviving. Brown et al. (2017) also reviewed published literature to investigate what others had discovered about why some humans thrive while others struggle or fail in their endeavors. The authors sketched out theoretical arguments and built conceptual viewpoints and applications that highlight various populations and field perspectives. They concentrated on gaining a critical understanding of succeeding, existing research areas, and areas needing further investigation. As causes of human flourishing, influential multifaceted factors such as psychosocial variables and personal and conceptual enablers emerged.

Environmental Support

Research shows various influential academic and environmental factors contribute to the low degree attainment of African American male students. A student's self-efficacy also affects their persistence (Roch, 2019). Research revealed that multiple relationship factors, such as aspirational, familial, and social capital, influenced college success rates. The study showed the importance of community college administrators focusing on how social capital and student success affect the ability of African American community college students to persist academically (Young, 2020). These factors highlight the importance of assisting African American male students inside and outside the classroom.

African American males defined their success and efficacy more often through athletic ability or nonacademic indicators in school (Hope, 2018). In other words, teenagers who place a low value on academic achievement are likelier to engage in nonacademic activities such as personal grooming, athletics, and dating, which might interfere with academic success (Hope, 2018). Because of the school, neighborhood, or a lack of educational resources, the academic outcomes of African American males are lower than those of White males. In other words, the African American males have been prejudged by the faculty and administration based on the schools they attended, the community they are from, and having the same educational resources afforded to their White peers. Although schools are personal spaces where kids learn about the world and about themselves, Jones and Reddick (2017) contended that teachers can never fully comprehend the ways in which their students are thinking. Hope (2018) posited that

mistrust could explain African American male students' lack of self-efficacy or negative perceptions of academic achievement in college.

Efforts have expanded to raise awareness and support for African American men at community colleges, particularly student achievement. While community colleges give students easy access, it is essential to remember that an open-door policy has many responsibilities. Access is the first step toward college student success, but access without success is pointless, whereas access with success is everything (Young, 2020). Every student wants to be successful when they go to college. However, obstacles to achievement include inadequate academic readiness and an incapacity to access resources in their surroundings. The public expects universities to fulfill their instructional mandates in order to produce successful postsecondary education that enables students to graduate and realize their professional ambitions (Caruth, 2018). Reduced enrollments, persistent disconnection, and limited degree attainment are among the reasons that many college administrators have developed and implemented mentoring programs, hosted Black male summits, started community and campus men-of-color missions, and promoted other large-scale efforts to promote student success (Young, 2020).

African American Male College Mentoring

Mentoring programs vary in structure and format at colleges and universities (Sparks, 2019). Institutions have identified factors that increase minority male students' participation on campus and reduce dropout rates. Some institutions have discovered that this demographic group's overall achievement lags behind the overall success of their student populations (Finkel, 2021). As a result, many colleges have developed unique

programs for African American male students to form a cohort that encourages and supports one another. However, colleges and universities nationwide are still struggling to attract, retain, and graduate students of color on pace with their White and Asian peers (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Wayne Jackson, director of Multicultural Academic and Support Services at the University of Central Florida (UCF), created the Brother to Brother (B2B) program to address the low retention and graduation rates of male African American and Hispanic students (Wood, 2020). First-and second-year retention rates for African American males at UCF have remained generally stable from 2016-2019, from 91.4% in 2016-17 to 87.5% in 2018-19 (Wood, 2020). B2B works with males to assist them in comprehending the importance of education and help them grasp the chances available to them for success.

African American students benefit from professional mentoring because it enhances their socializing and learning experiences. The San Antonio College Men Empowerment Network (SACMEN) strives to boost African American and Latino boys' involvement, enrollment, retention, and graduation rates (Casas, 2019). Students' GPAs were in the low 2.0s before implementing the San Antonio College Men Empowerment Network. However, students' grades increased after joining SACMEN, with some students having GPAs of 3.5 or higher (Casas, 2019). Professional mentorship programs can help students develop positive attitudes toward their school, decrease dropout, and overcome social hurdles.

Summary and Conclusions

A review of the literature revealed information about persistence, barriers, and support systems for African American male students in higher education, emphasizing academic, cocurricular, and environmental factors. Tinto's theory of student departure conceptual framework was discussed in Chapter 2. The research expands on the history of community colleges and the African American male students who attend them. The importance of African American male student persistence and success was highlighted in the literature review. In Chapter 2, examples of supportive structures that influence the educational experiences of African American male community college students were also discussed. Despite the obstacles, African American male students can persist and advance academically. The study's methodology, including the research design and method, population, and sample of students, is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The problem investigated in this study was African American male students' lack of 1st-year persistence at a community college in the southeast. In this basic qualitative study, I aimed to explore the experiences of 1st-year African American male students that contribute to their decisions to persist at a community college in a southeastern state. This qualitative study relied heavily on understanding the viewpoints of African American male students. The views of African American male students were shared through an interview process. The research questions used for this study were based on Tinto's (1988) student departure theory. The questions focused on the student's motivation and dedication to the school and their aim for college graduation. The study's qualitative research design and strategy, data collection, data analysis, and constraints are covered in this section.

Research Design and Rationale

The procedures or strategies used to find, select, process, and analyze information about a topic are referred to as research methodology. The instruments used to conduct research are referred to as research methods. These can be qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of both. At its most fundamental level, the qualitative approach is about observing, comprehending, and interacting with people (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Multiple "truths" are generated using a qualitative methodology from real-world settings such as business environments and contexts. The findings are specific to the local environment but can be applied to similar settings and circumstances. This study was designed as a qualitative study because it explored the perceptions of the chosen population. Even

though different research methods have advantages and disadvantages, the research questions should drive the methodology chosen for the study. In this study, the following research question promoted an understanding of what motivates African American male students to persist beyond the 1st year at a community college: What are the experiences of 1st-year African American male students that contribute to their decisions to persist at a community college in a southeastern state? A qualitative methodology was best for this study to answer the research question because it provided a deeper understanding of the individual perceptions of 1st-year African American male student experiences.

Traditionally, a qualitative design would involve gathering comprehensive accounts of how African American male students acquired persistence strategies. Therefore, a basic qualitative research design was best for this study because it collected the students' perspectives that researchers may not have previously identified. Researchers use quantitative methods to collect numerical data and measure independent variables. The data for this qualitative study were acquired through participant interviews.

Role of the Researcher

I work as an information technology instructor at a community college in a southeastern state. I have been working with community college students for 16 years. I collected data for this study at a community college I was affiliated with. I only interviewed those students I had not taught in the past to reduce potential biases. I also used research literature to support my conclusions, identified key themes from the data, included personal reflections, and accepted the study's limitations to ensure its quality. I

also used an outside transcription company to lessen the possibility of bias in the study. My experience as a community college instructor and my interaction with college administrators piqued my interest in the persistence of African American males in community college. It sparked a desire to learn more about assisting African American male students who face the most significant challenges in obtaining a degree in this educational setting. During one-on-one semistructured interviews with African American male students, I was responsible for collecting data by offering thought-provoking, open-ended questions. The researcher becomes qualitative research's primary data collection and analysis tool (Young, 2020). All research files, drafts, collected data, and transcripts were maintained in a locked file cabinet.

Methodology

The methodology for this study was qualitative. In qualitative research, the goal is to determine the meaning of a phenomenon based on the perspectives of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This qualitative study explored the experiences of 1st-year African American male students that contribute to their decisions to persist at a community college in a southeastern state. In the methodology section, I describe the study's participant selection, instrumentation, recruitment procedures, participation, data collection, and the data analysis plan. To identify and describe the experiences of African American male students enrolled at a community college, the following research question guided the study: What are the experiences of 1st-year African American male students that contribute to their decisions to persist at a community college in a southeastern state?

Participant Selection

The sampling strategy used for this study was purposive sampling. A purposive sample is a nonprobability sample chosen based on population characteristics and the study's objectives (Crossman, 2020). Participants were African American male students enrolled at a southeastern community college. The recruitment process began by distributing flyers on campus. The target population was those African American male students who had persisted beyond their 1st year at community college. I contacted those students who wanted to participate in the study via email. The population was appropriate for this study problem and purpose as the goal was to increase awareness and understanding of African American community college male students' success. This study focused on African American male students who were enrolled and persisted beyond the 1st year. Vasileiou et al. (2018) asserted that researchers conducting an interview-based study with a reasonably specific research question generate little new information after interviewing approximately 20 people belonging to one analytically relevant participant category. Therefore, this study was designed to include interviews with 10–14 students who met the criteria.

Instrumentation

Ensuring content validity is critical to the acceptance of any given research. The development of instruments was the first step toward ensuring content validity. Developing criteria for relevance, clarity, simplicity, and ambiguity aided in determining the specific domain to measure. Furthermore, developing interview questions designed to elicit the experiences of 1st-year African American male students that contributed to their

decisions to continue their education at a community college in a southeastern state helped to ensure validity. I developed the interview protocol using the conceptual framework of Tinto's departure theory (see Appendix B). The questions were open-ended, aligned with the research question, and based on relevant sources within the literature review. Open-ended questions were used along with associated probing questions to clarify responses or allow participants to expand on their answers.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Before data collection, approval was obtained from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to carry out the study. A copy of the IRB approval was provided to each participant at HCC, a community college in the southeast. The recruiting process began with distributing flyers (see Appendix A) around campus in high student-trafficked areas, such as the campus student center and various classrooms. The flyers contained a study description and my contact information. Those who expressed interest in participating were sent an informed consent form.

The informed consent stated the study's goals, duration, \$25 gift card receipt, and voluntary participation. Participants were free to leave the interview at any point or refuse to answer a particular question. Those who agreed to participate in the study were asked to reply to the email with "I consent," indicating their willingness to engage in the research and their comprehension of the risks and rewards involved.

Data were collected using responses from semistructured, open-ended interview questions to explore the lived experiences of the research participants. Interviews were held using Zoom to prevent scheduling issues. African American males who had

persisted beyond their 1st year at a community college in a southeastern state were interviewed. Each interview was at least 45 minutes; an additional 15 minutes may have been needed for follow-up questions. Even though the discussions were recorded, notes were taken. Roller (2017) posited that taking notes during an interview allows the interviewer to focus on the participant's point of view and lived experience relevant to the research question. Before the interview, participants were reminded that they could stop the interview at any time or decline permission to record the interview. Participants were also informed that the interview would be recorded. Recording the session enabled me to ensure the accuracy of the data collected during the interview. Recording ensures rigor and validity in qualitative research (Rutakumwa et al., 2019).

Participants were asked follow-up questions to elaborate on the responses given for clarity. At the end of the interview, participants could ask additional questions. Participants were reminded of the purpose of the study and that their inclusion in the study remained voluntary. They were reassured that their responses were confidential. Transcription Hub, an online transcription service, was used to convert the audio/video interviews to readable text. Each participant received a copy of the preliminary results. I requested that each participant review the results and provide any necessary feedback if they so desired. This assisted with increasing the accuracy and validity of the results.

Data Analysis Plan

I used the interview protocol to manage the interview and the participants' background data (see Appendix B). The field notes included the interview questions and any follow-up questions. The data were composed of interview replies and field notes.

Following participant evaluation and acceptance of the accuracy of the transcripts, I used an inductive coding procedure to find recurring or consistent patterns in the data that helped me identify the themes. For this study, open coding was used. Open coding enables researchers to analyze data and generate labels, sometimes known as codes, for segments of data that provide a concise summary of the events or phenomena (Tucker, 2021). Axial coding was used to look for emerging themes. In addition, computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (QDA Miner) aided in the organization and analysis of data. Any discrepant cases were reported, and additional times were set up to gather further information.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a critical component of the qualitative research process. Beck (2021) contended that qualitative research's trustworthiness is questionable to positivist researchers because the data are not determined similarly to quantitative work, which includes statistical support for the findings. The researcher should be confident that the information gathered from the sources and methods is accurate. The study established trustworthiness by ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Credibility

Credibility depends on the richness of the data and analysis and can be enhanced by triangulation rather than relying on sample size to represent a population (Stumpfegger, 2017). Credibility was established by spending time analyzing the participants' responses. I also used member checking to check for credibility and validity by sharing the study results with the participants, allowing each participant to confirm the

accuracy and resonance of the data with their own experiences. Audio recording and transcripts helped eliminate any bias from the interview or misinterpretation of participants' responses to the interview questions.

Transferability

Transferability corresponds to external validity. Transferability can be achieved by thoroughly describing the research context and underlying assumptions (Stumpfegger, 2017). Transferability was established by providing evidence from my research findings that might apply to other contexts, situations, times, and populations. Moss (2019) stated that it is up to others to determine whether findings can be applied to their particular situations. In other words, other researchers and administrators should be able to use this research in similar cases in their environments.

Dependability

Dependability aims to replace reliability, requiring the same results to be achieved when replicating experiments (Stumpfegger, 2017). Dependability was established by ensuring that the research findings were consistent and replicable. As the researcher, I verified that the study findings followed the data collected during the interviews by coding the data, increasing the level of dependability. I also took great care to ensure that the research notes and records, as well as interview recordings, were collected and stored in system files that were secure and accessible. This type of record-keeping is called an audit trail (Moss, 2019). If another researcher examines the data, they should arrive at similar findings, interpretations, and conclusions.

Confirmability

An audit trail was used to justify all decisions made throughout data analysis. It involved documenting the material gathered for the study, including the examined data, to ensure confirmability. Confirmability involves investigating the influence of an individual's bias and prejudice on the analysis and understanding of data (Tucker, 2021). The study's conclusions were derived from the participants' narratives, which were collected in a manner that minimized researcher biases. Outsourcing the transcription of the interviews to an external agency minimized the potential for subjective influence in the transcription process.

Ethical Procedures

To conduct ethical qualitative research, a researcher must comprehend, consider, and approach study-related difficulties (Tucker, 2021). Participants were often informed in a variety of ways. Each participant also received information about the study's objectives, the method of participant selection, how their identity would be secured, and how long the interview would take. Participants received an informed consent form and their invitation to participate, which they had to electronically complete and sign to confirm their agreement to participate in the study, while being aware that they were free to end the interview at any moment. During the interviews and data analysis, I employed pseudonyms to conceal the participants' and the research site's identities. All data were kept confidential to protect the privacy of all participants, build trust and rapport with participants, and maintain ethical standards and the integrity of the research process.

A password-protected personal computer was used to store the data gathered for this project. Hard copies of the data analysis were kept in a lockable file cabinet at my home office. Password encryption was employed and updated while the data were stored on the computer to prevent errors, information loss, or corruption. All relevant data for this project, including interview transcripts, recordings, and informed consent, were kept on a backup flash drive. As the researcher, I was the only one with access to the data. All paper records will be destroyed and recycled after 5 years, and any data on flash drives or recordings will be deleted from my computer's hard drive. The destroyed records, when they were done, and how I did it will all be documented.

Participants received a \$25 gift card for participating in this study as compensation for their time. Using incentives to attract participants hastened response times and boosted participation. Participants could still receive the incentive if they began the interview process but opted to stop before it was finished. As a result, no participant was penalized for skipping a question or opting to end the interview early.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I explained my rationale for selecting a basic qualitative study to explore African American male students' perceptions of the factors contributing to their 1st-year persistence at a southeastern community college in the United States. Participants' experiences were used to better understand student persistence in a community college setting. Semistructured interviews were used to explore student persistence at community colleges in a southeastern state. I was responsible for analyzing and interpreting the data, using subjective judgment, and incorporating participants'

realities. Chapter 3 focused on the methodology of the study, participant selection, and my role as the researcher. Additionally, key measures to ensure the trustworthiness of this study were addressed, along with ethical considerations to provide moral protection for both the participants and the data. Chapter 4 contains the analysis and findings from the current study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of 1st-year African American male students that contribute to their decisions to persist at a community college in a southeastern state. The following research question guided this study: What are the strategies of 1st-year African American male students that contributed to their decision to persist at the community college?

The results of this study are based on the data collected through individual semistructured interviews conducted via Zoom with African American males who had persisted beyond their 1st year at a community college in a southeastern state. In this chapter, I highlight the themes that emerged from the interview data. This chapter includes a discussion of the setting and any strategies the participants used to persist beyond their 1st year at a community college, as well as data collection and analysis. In this chapter, I also present evidence of trustworthiness and the results and conclude with a summary.

Setting

African American male students who enrolled at community colleges throughout a southeastern state and progressed beyond their 1st year were invited to participate in this study. After obtaining approval from the Walden University IRB, I began recruiting participants for this research study by posting flyers on LinkedIn and Facebook. Participants were also recruited by word of mouth by followers who saw the announcement posted on my Facebook page. Two hours after posting the flyer, I received six responses via email from students who wanted to participate in the study. Eight weeks

later, I reposted the flyer to my LinkedIn page and Facebook page. After the second posting, I received four more requests from students who wanted to participate in the study over 6 weeks.

Upon receiving the participants' requests, I emailed each participant a consent form describing the study and the interview process. Each participant was required to consent to the study via email, stating, "I consent." Along with their consent statement, the participants had to send three dates and times they would be available for interviews. Once I had received their consent statement, I sent them an email that contained a Zoom link and a date and time for their scheduled interview. Before interviewing the participants, my chair and I reviewed the interview questions. On the day of each interview, the participants were given pseudonyms that ensured anonymity. The American Psychological Association (2020) stated that using pseudonyms shields the participants' identity and enables them to remain anonymous, particularly when discussing sensitive, personal, or stigmatized topics.

While the study focused on African American males who had persisted beyond their 1st year at the community college in a southeastern state, the participants either worked toward or obtained a degree in various program areas. The participants also ranged in age from 19–66. This demographic information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1*Demographic Information*

Participant #	Major	Age
Participant 1	IT/Cybersecurity	57
Participant 2	IT	19
Participant 3	Culinary arts	20
Participant 4	Natural science	21
Participant 5	Electrical systems	20
Participant 6	General education	52
Participant 7	Electronics	66
Participant 8	Information technology	28
Participant 9	General education	23
Participant 10	College transfer	19
Participant 11	Business	25

Note. This table shows the demographics of the participants.

Data Collection

I began collecting data by conducting semistructured interviews on March 1, 2023. This data collection tool was chosen because interviews form the backbone of primary data collection in qualitative research design (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). The data were collected from 11 African American male community college students. However, only 10 participants' data were included because one interview lacked audio clarity. To participate in the study, participants had to be African American males who had attended a community college in a southeastern state for more than 1 year.

All interviews were scheduled to accommodate the participants. The length of time for the interviews was between 30 and 45 minutes. Because the participants lived in various locations, the interviews were conducted using Zoom conferencing. I initially thought it would take about 3 weeks to complete the interviews. However, due to

recruitment issues and the need to accommodate the varying schedules and availability of participants, I had to extend the interview process for 4 weeks.

All participants were asked the same 13 interview questions. Questions 1, 2, and 3 provided background information about participants' perceptions of community colleges, majors, and enrollment status. Interview Question 4 asked students to discuss both their long and short-term educational goals and their long and short-term career goals. Interview Questions 5, 7, and 12 focused on the participants' motivational strategies that assisted them in their persistence beyond their 1st year at the community college. Interview Question 6 asked students to describe barriers that may have affected their persistence at the community college. Questions 9, 10, and 11 focused on support systems that the participants felt helped their persistence on and off campus. Interview Question 13 asked the participants to suggest changes they would like to see at their community college. One participant indicated that he would like to see more diversity on campus in terms of instructors and staff members.

I began each interview by introducing myself to each participant and asking them to turn off their cameras if they were turned on. I thanked them for their willingness to participate in the research study. So that the participants would have a clear understanding of the research study, I read the purpose to them as it appeared on the consent form. I informed them that I wanted them to be as truthful as possible. They were also told that they could skip a question if they did not feel comfortable answering it at any time. The participants could also choose to stop the interview at any time. I informed them that to remain anonymous, the real names of their college and the participants' real

names would not be mentioned in the study. I allowed the participants to ask questions before and after each interview. After each interview, each participant was sent a link for a \$25.00 Walmart e-gift card.

Data Analysis

The Zoom transcription tool was used to record the data. When a recording is stopped, the transcript and audio files are immediately saved in a Zoom folder. On an external hard drive, I made a folder for each participant. Each folder was labeled with the name of the participant. I copied the transcript and audio file from the Zoom folder. I pasted them into the folder of the corresponding participant to ensure that the correct transcript and audio file were placed with the correct participant.

Reviewing and cleaning each transcript included listening to each audio track and eliminating inaudible words or phrases. I saved updated changes to each transcript. After I cleaned each transcript, I emailed the corresponding participant a copy of their transcript to check for accuracy. Establishing validity is crucial in any qualitative research study. There are various methods to achieve this, with member-checking being a commonly used technique. The purpose of member-checking is to enhance the credibility of the data (McKim, 2023). Participants were given 7 days to review their transcripts. I received feedback from eight participants indicating that they agreed with what appeared in the transcript. Although two participants did not respond, I still considered their transcripts accurate.

After completing the member-checking process, I began preparing to enter the data into NVivo. The NVivo qualitative data analysis software was used to store,

organize, and code the data. NVivo software allows for the collecting, sorting, and analysis of nonnumerical data obtained from the interview transcripts in a password-secured but easily accessible resource for the researcher (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). The first step when using NVivo is to create a project file. I did this by opening the NVivo application installed on my computer. After launching the NVivo application, I clicked the “New Project” option. This began the process of creating a new NVivo project file. I was then prompted to give the file a name, a description, and a location where I wanted to save the file. Once I had filled in the needed information, I clicked the “Create” button, allowing NVivo to create the project file. After creating the project, I started importing the interview transcripts’ text files. The data were then coded, and an analysis was conducted.

Through the process of open coding, I began coding the data. Open coding is the process of breaking the data into smaller units, such as phrases or sentences, and labeling them with descriptive codes (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022). These codes represent the most basic elements of the data and capture the key concepts, actions, or ideas present. Given that my codes were based on my interview questions, I started the process of coding in NVivo. To do so, I clicked “Codes” in the left navigation bar in NVivo. This opened a blank screen. From the blank screen, I right-clicked and selected “New Codes” from the drop-down menu. This displayed a window that allowed me to type in the code name, and then I clicked “OK.” I followed this same process as I coded all 13 questions. Once I had all my codes, I looked at each transcript imported into NVivo and highlighted relevant statements correlated with each code I created. As I highlighted the relevant text,

I right-clicked and selected the code matching the statement. Some statements fell under multiple codes. The initial codes are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Initial Codes From Transcripts

Code	Files coded	Total references
Academic challenges	6	6
Additional forms of support off-campus	7	10
Barriers that affected persistence	9	9
Changes needed (faculty or support programs)	5	7
Factors or influences that motivated continued enrollment	9	13
Factors that contributed to academic success	9	11
Family involvement	7	9
Perceptions about community colleges	7	8
Relationship with faculty members	9	9
Student support programs	8	11

Note. This table shows the initial codes and total references pulled from NVivo.

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Tinto's theory of student departure. The three major sources of student departure are as follows:

- academic difficulties
- the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals
- failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution

Because Tinto's theory focuses on understanding and addressing student retention and attrition in higher education, I focused on those codes that would indicate the strategies the participants used to persist beyond their 1st year at the community college. I examined the transcripts closely to pull out statements or phrases that would fall under each code. To perform this task, I highlighted a statement or phrase, right-clicked, selected the code that it corresponded with, and then clicked "OK." The top three codes were selected based on the highest total references, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3*Final Code Structure*

Code	References
Factors or influences that motivated continued enrollment	Self-motivation Parent's work ethic Get a better job College atmosphere Wanted to get a better job
Factors that contributed to academic success	Teachers/Instructors Self-motivation Time management Being organized
Student support programs	Friends Community college staff Student support groups and tutoring services Balancing school and home responsibilities Finances
Barriers to persistence	Transportation Speech impediment Age Time management Writing Test anxiety "Start and continue my education."
Academic challenges	Flexible scheduling Student-friendly environment Training for employment Prepare for 4-yr. institutions
Benefits of a community college	

Note. This table demonstrates the final code structure and references.

Results

All participants were asked the same 15 open-ended interview questions. Interview Questions 1, 2, and 8 provided background information about the participant's strategies that helped them persist beyond their 1st year at the community college. Data analysis revealed three significant themes that pertained to the research question that

guided this basic qualitative research study. The six themes aligned with the RQ are factors or influences that motivated continued enrollment, factors that contributed to academic success, and student support programs.

Factors That Influenced Decisions to Persist

Researchers have shown that African American men are more likely to enroll because community colleges offer broad access and are more affordable than 4-year universities (Ingram & Coaxum, 2018). For the study's participants, some factors or influences motivated continued enrollment at the community college. Various variables, personal to the student, are associated with college performance. Clinton (2019) asserted that family, peers, and institutions are crucial for Black males both before and during college. Additionally, their interactions with faculty and their personal resilience contribute significantly to their success. All participants in this study were asked what factors contributed to their academic success.

Ingram and Coaxum (2018) provided insight into why African American men are likelier to persist in community colleges, such as affordability and access. The participants in this study emphasized the roles that family and community, self-efficacy, academic factors, and their perceptions of community colleges played in their decision to persist beyond their 1st year at the community college. Their family and community offered emotional and motivational support and empowered them to overcome systemic barriers, instilling in them resilience and ambition. Self-efficacy and community encouragement also impacted the participant's decision to persist; the participants valued mentorship, tutoring, and a supportive campus environment. Lastly, their perceptions of

community colleges began with skepticism to recognize the value of community colleges as affordable, flexible, and supportive educational pathways.

Family and Community Influences on Persistence

Family and community are more than just sources of support; they are the driving forces that motivate African American male students to persevere in adversity. Family and community contribute to overcoming the systemic challenges that African American male students experience, allowing them to achieve their educational goals while also breaking free from cycles of inequity. It is about instilling a sense of self-worth, tenacity, and the notion that, with hard work, everything is possible. Both family and community support the students in meeting basic educational requirements but also assist the participants in achieving their academic goals.

Participant 1 shared how family and community influenced his persistence:

My primary motivation has been my son, grandkids, and mother, as well as my community, predominantly African Americans. I have observed a wealth of talent in my community, often overlooked or wasted due to systemic challenges and barriers to career advancement. My goal in pursuing an education is to create a better future for my children, reducing the struggles that I've seen African American men and women face in the workforce.

Participant 10 offered insight into their motivation, explaining, "Seeing how hard my parents have to work to make ends meet. That motivates me more than anything because I do not want to struggle the way my parents have to struggle. Also, I want to be a role model for the younger kids."

Participant 11 revealed what fueled their educational journey: “I think what motivated me was knowing that my parents were proud of me for continuing my education. I think that was my motivation.”

Participant 2 and Participant 6 described their family-inspired motivations. Participant 2 indicated that his main motivator was his mom because she had supported him. Meanwhile, Participant 6 recalled a pivotal moment: how [my] grandmother sat [me] down one day and urged [me] to go to school and get [my] degree because she wanted [me] to be her little professor. That conversation stuck with [me] for quite some time.

The data collected from the participants show how family and community support played a role in their persistence. The blend of personal motivation and collective aspiration highlights the transformative impact of education—not just as a series of academic achievements but as a journey toward overcoming obstacles and making a difference. The data showed that education is more than a path to a career; it is a path to changing lives, starting with their own, and extending to those around them. Building on the personal and collectively aspirational motivations, the attention is now turned to self-efficacy factors that pushed our participants to persist in their educational journeys, underscoring the belief in their abilities to overcome challenges and achieve their goals.

Self-Efficacy Influences on Persistence

The data showed that self-efficacy factors influenced the persistence of the participants. One participant talked about turning tough breaks into stepping stones, showing how a strong belief in oneself can help overcome personal challenges and

inspire positive changes in the community. Another participant highlighted the struggle of being underestimated because of racial identity, yet the participant's unwavering drive and self-belief kept him moving forward, defying societal expectations. The thought of perseverance brings up an important point: The power of self-motivation and the relentless belief in one's success are essential, especially when external support might be missing. Then, there is the simple yet profound strategy of reminding oneself never to give up, a mantra that encapsulates the essence of persistence. The following data show that a strong belief in oneself can light the way through the most challenging times, guiding us toward achieving our goals and beyond.

Participant 1 shared their perspective on adversity, stating:

I believe in converting negative experiences into positive action. Although there are days when I feel down and question why I must endure these hardships, I recognize the importance of using these moments as opportunities for change. By staying strong and resilient, I aim to impact my community and family positively.

Participant 5 reflected on their drive and the unique challenges faced as an African American, expressing, "I've always been a driven person. So as an African American, I've always just felt that sometimes we're looked down upon or, you, sometimes we're just not understood."

Participant 6 reflected on the essence of perseverance, noting:

The most important thing is to have a strong desire for success, more than anything else. While I had support from my family, I understand that many people might not have that. It's important to find your drive and reassure yourself that

you will succeed and not just become a statistic. Maintaining that self-motivation is key.

Lastly, participant 10 emphasized the importance of persistence, saying, “I just keep telling myself no matter how hard things get, I should not give up. That is what I think about all the time.”

The data paints a vivid picture of resilience, determination, and the power of a positive mindset. Together, the data offers a powerful testament to the strength of perseverance, the importance of self-motivation, and the transformative potential of facing hardships with courage and optimism.

Academic Factors That Influence Persistence

There is evidence to support the idea that well-designed student service programs can increase community college students’ persistence and completion rates (Dawson et al., 2021). Furthermore, researchers discovered that social integration via friendship support was directly associated with persistence in college. Social integration refers to inclusion in the social structure of the college, constituted of one’s peers (Tinto & Cullen, 1973). African American males who participated in this study cited support they received on and off campus.

Participant 4 highlighted the necessity of seeking assistance when facing academic challenges. “There have been a few instances where I needed to meet with lecturers, especially for a course where I struggled with the material. This led me to seek help from others, possibly through tutoring, after school.”

Building on the importance of academic support, Participant 7 shared their positive experience with tutoring services. “The tutoring service was very, very good, and it helps you out, and if you’ve got a tutor, you know you’re not afraid to go with them. Go to them with whatever problems you have; they can help you a lot.”

Participant 8 commented on the welcoming and diverse community within the college:

The atmosphere at the college is so accepting and diverse, and there are students from many different backgrounds. The friends I have made at school. They have been supportive and helpful when I needed it. They give me encouragement and give me someone to talk to. They give me a lot of positive feedback when I need it.

Reflecting on personal connections, Participant 6 shared a memorable interaction. “I recalled meeting two ladies at his community college. Both ladies worked in the business office, and [I] became friends with them. They motivated [me] while [I] took courses at the community college.”

Emphasizing the value of structured support, Participant 3 cited the benefits of mentorship and tutoring. “Mentoring student support groups and tutoring services provided [me] with the support [I] needed while at the community college.”

Lastly, Participant 1 found value in leveraging digital resources for educational growth. “To help [me] better understand current happenings in [my] field of cybersecurity, I relied on podcasts. The podcasts motivated me and provided me a resource for understanding cybersecurity.”

Perceptions of Community College That Influence Student Decisions

The affordability, supportive environment, and diverse academic resources available at community colleges play a role in fostering the persistence of 1st-year African American male students, as these institutions offer a conducive setting for honing essential strategies that contribute to their academic success and long-term educational goals. Students appreciate the affordability, flexibility in scheduling, and diverse course offerings these institutions provide. Additionally, community colleges are often seen as a stepping-stone toward achieving academic and career goals, making them an essential part of the educational landscape.

Participant 1 expressed a positive outlook: “My initial impression of community colleges was that they would be a great place to start and continue my education. I didn’t consider four-year colleges better for preparing me for my career or personal development. I was focused on my goals, so I saw community college as a great opportunity to further my education.”

Participant 2 initially had reservations but came to see the value, explaining, “At first, I didn’t consider community college much. It wasn’t something I saw myself doing. But then, as I thought about it, it made sense. I saw community college as a place where people could enter the university experience. It’s where you can prepare yourself and acquire the necessary knowledge. So, when you eventually enter a university, you’re better equipped to understand how things work, thanks to your time in community college.”

Participant 6 shared a journey from skepticism to understanding. The participant's initial perceptions of community colleges were shaped by a high school culture celebrating university admissions as the pinnacle of academic achievement. Attending a community college was not seen as an equally commendable choice but rather as a fallback option for those deemed unable to secure a place in a 4-year university.

Participant 6 revealed:

Before I enrolled, my perception of community college was that it was just a place for those who weren't smart enough to get into a university. I thought the only option you had was community college. My high school experience influenced this view, where the "smarter" people applied to universities. Attending the local community college was looked down upon in my neighborhood. There was a stigma that if you went to community college, it meant you couldn't get into a university. That was my entire outlook on the community college system.

Participant 11 discussed a shift in his perspective about community colleges after a personal experience, saying:

I initially planned to attend a four-year university after high school and dropped out after the 1st year. I had a negative perception of community colleges but eventually decided to attend one after working for my dad's carpentry business. I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of education and eventually majored in business, aiming to assist with my dad's business. When I look back at it now, I believe that community colleges are a good option for those not ready for a four-

year university. I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of education and eventually majored in business, aiming to assist with my dad's business. When I look back at it now, I believe that community colleges are a good option for those not ready for a four-year university.

Students' perceptions of community colleges can vary significantly. Many initially hold opposing views, thinking community colleges might not provide a quality education compared to 4-year universities. However, personal experiences often challenge these perceptions. Warner (2022) contended that some students find community colleges a valuable stepping-stone, offering flexible schedules, affordable tuition, and opportunities to explore different fields of study.

Barriers That Influence Student Persistence

Community colleges play a crucial role in providing accessible education to a diverse range of students, including those from marginalized backgrounds. However, while community colleges are intended to be a pathway to higher education and career success, Black male students often encounter unique barriers that can significantly impact their academic achievement and persistence. Some Black male students may have family responsibilities, such as caring for dependents or contributing to household income, making it challenging to devote time and energy to their studies. Stokes (2020) asserted that commitments outside of college obligations could take time and energy away from students' studies, such as finances, transportation, family responsibilities, and stressful life events.

Academic Barriers That Influence Student Persistence

African Americans at community colleges face a multifaceted set of academic challenges that extend beyond time management, including pressures of meeting degree requirements, difficulties with specific subjects such as writing, and the absence of support services. Unique personal circumstances, like returning to education later in life, and psychological barriers, such as test anxiety, further complicate their academic journey. These experiences underscore the critical need for comprehensive support systems within community colleges, incorporating academic tutoring, counseling, and adaptive learning strategies to address the wide range of challenges and support the diverse needs of students, ensuring they have the resources necessary to overcome obstacles and succeed academically.

Participant 4 highlighted the comprehensive demands of their academic journey, stating:

There were many requirements I had to fulfill, such as completing the necessary credits to obtain my degree. Some of the courses were difficult, which at times made me think about giving up and seeking something else to do. However, the determination to realize my goals and support from mentors and peers kept me anchored, pushing me to overcome the challenges and ultimately succeed.

Participant 6 addressed their difficulties with writing, expressing:

Writing was one of the challenges that I struggled with. I wasn't the best writer, and I wish I could have been stronger in that area. If I look back at it now, I would have sought out tutoring for writing if there was tutoring for writing at my

college. I would have searched for that resource. Today, so many resources for students weren't available back then. So, I would say that writing was my weakness.

Participant 7 discussed the unique challenges of returning to education at an advanced age, stating, "Besides my age, returning to college at age 66 presented a unique challenge for me. After being out of school for a long time, my main barrier was catching up and getting up to speed in the classroom."

Participant 8 shared their struggle with test anxiety and their coping strategies, saying:

My biggest academic challenge was test anxiety. This is something I dealt with throughout high school. It wasn't just about feeling nervous before an exam; I would worry about the test more as the time approached to take the test. This had an impact on how I did in class. To overcome this, I would try changing my thoughts about the test. I try to encourage myself and tell myself I can pass the test. One thing I did was work through all the easy problems first and then return and do the hard ones.

In examining the data, the participants discussed the academic barriers that influenced their persistence. One participant reflected on his struggle with writing, expressing regret over not seeking tutoring during his college years when such support was not as readily available as it is today. This highlights the critical role of accessible educational assistance in bolstering students' academic skills and confidence. Another participant, who returned to academia at an average age, emphasized the daunting task of

catching up academically after a significant hiatus from formal education. This account illustrates older students' unique challenges and their resilience. A third participant discussed his battle with test anxiety, describing it as an issue that significantly affected his academic performance. By adopting strategic test-taking approaches and engaging in positive self-talk, he developed adequate coping mechanisms that helped with his test anxiety. The data offer insightful perspectives into the varied barriers the participants encountered along their educational paths, underscoring the necessity for comprehensive support systems that cater to diverse student needs and foster academic achievement.

Personal Barriers' Influences on Student Persistence

The journey to higher education for the participants was marked by significant challenges, predominantly centered on balancing school, personal, and professional obligations. This study highlighted several key issues faced by the participants, including the struggle to manage full-time education alongside other responsibilities, the challenge of time management, and the impact of procrastination on academic performance. These obstacles often lead to stress, last-minute submissions, or missed deadlines, underscoring the importance of seeking guidance and utilizing strategies to maintain balance. The personal experiences shared by participants suggest the essential need for targeted support and resources, ensuring adult learners have the tools to navigate their educational paths successfully and achieve academic success.

Participant 8 highlighted his multifaceted challenge: "One of [my] main challenges was trying to balance school full-time and [my] responsibilities at home along with helping others." He emphasized the importance of seeking guidance, adding, "It is

important to seek advice from instructors and advisors to find a balance and not overwhelm oneself with stress, which can lead to dropping out of school.”

Participant 3 shared his struggle managing his time effectively during the past semester at community college. He indicated, “The past semester at the community college, [I] had struggled with time management. This posed a significant academic challenge for [me].” He elaborated on the difficulty of juggling various responsibilities, saying, “[I] found it challenging to balance his coursework with [my] part-time job and other responsibilities.”

Participant 10 discussed the constant battle with time as a significant barrier to his success in community college. He stated, “As a community college student, one of the barriers I faced at the community college was the constant struggle with time. Balancing work, family responsibilities, and coursework was a daily challenge.” He further explained the impact of this struggle on his academic performance, noting:

I often found myself in a race against the clock to complete assignments and meet deadlines. Working part-time and trying to make ends meet, along with family commitments, left me little time to focus on my schoolwork. As a result, I often submitted assignments just in the nick of time and sometimes missed deadlines entirely.

Participant 11 addressed a common issue many students face: procrastination. He shared, “When I initially enrolled in community college, I struggled with procrastination. I often found myself waiting until the last minute to complete my assignments, which negatively affected my grades.” He took proactive steps to combat this: “To address this

issue, I started setting a goal to finish my assignments by Wednesday, allowing me to balance my academic responsibilities with part-time work alongside my dad.”

In community colleges, students confront many academic and personal challenges, from balancing demanding coursework with personal responsibilities to the relentless struggle with time management. Echoing shared experiences, students detailed the complexity of juggling full-time education, part-time work, and home responsibilities, alongside combating procrastination and the constant race against deadlines. These accounts highlight students’ significant hurdles, including overwhelming stress and missed opportunities, underscoring the need for comprehensive support systems. Educational institutions offering tailored advice, mentorship, and resources are crucial in aiding students in navigating these challenges effectively. Such support not only aids in overcoming setbacks but also fosters resilience, enabling students to persevere through the stressful academic journey and thrive despite adversity.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Chapter 3 discussed trustworthiness for qualitative research concerning credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. This section addresses the implementation of strategies to enhance the study’s trustworthiness.

Credibility

The data collected were verified for accuracy by member checking, and interviews were audio recorded to ensure credibility. The data’s accuracy was ensured by recording the interviews, which also enabled me to review it as frequently as necessary. The recorded transcript also eliminated any biases that may have distorted the interviews

or misinterpreted the true meaning of the questions posed during the interview process. Member checking was implemented to guarantee that participants reviewed their interview transcripts to verify the information they had obtained during the interview process and that the information they provided was derived from the strategies they employed to persist beyond their 1st year at the community college as member checking was crucial to the credibility of my research. The interview transcripts were sent to each participant to ensure that the information was accurate and truthful to the best of their ability. This process also enabled the participants to modify or supplement the transcript that was provided. The interview questions were reviewed by the IRB personnel prior to the interview process. Data saturation was reached when no new information was provided by participants and no new themes were identified.

Transferability

Transferability is frequently recognized as a quality criterion for qualitative research (Stalmeijer et al., 2024). To guarantee transferability, an in-depth description of the setting was given. The Zoom transcription tool was employed to transcribe the data collected through audio recordings. The sample of nine African American males who had persisted at a community college in a southeastern state beyond their 1st year.

Transferability was enhanced by elaborating on the research setting and methodologies, particularly on African American males attending a community college in a southeastern state. The study's focus on a particular demographic was intended to resonate with individuals who have experienced similar circumstances, rendering the research findings more relatable. Additionally, the study engaged with existing literature by employing

theoretical frameworks to analyze persistence among the participants and selecting a focused sample, thereby proposing models that improve the comprehension of educational persistence. This method guaranteed that the results apply in theoretical and practical contexts and can be transferred across different contexts.

Dependability

Accuracy of the data collected was guaranteed by verifying all responses with the participants to assure dependability. Themes from the interviewees were evaluated after this process was finished. Additionally, the specific interview responses of the participants were employed to emphasize a variety of themes. This method is consistent with the principle of dependability, which emphasizes the significance of obtaining consistent and accurate results in research. Researchers guarantee the dependability of their data collection process by validating all responses with participants, aligning with Stumpfegger's (2017) emphasis on the importance of consistent results in experimental replications. This verification process is crucial for ensuring the veracity of the data collected, thereby improving the reliability of the study. Additionally, the meticulous methodology of maintaining the integrity and trustworthiness of the research findings is evident in the meticulous review of emergent themes and the use of participants' precise responses to elucidate these themes. This method is essential for guaranteeing that the conclusions of the study are reliable, reproducible, and accurately reflect the phenomena under investigation.

Confirmability

Confirmability aims to investigate how a person's bias and prejudice may affect how they understand data (Tucker, 2021). I showed a dedication to transparency and reflexivity by double-checking the facts and being accountable to myself along the way. I also acknowledged potential biases and lessened their effects. Methodological techniques that improve data handling objectivity and consistency include using NVivo software for data coding and Zoom transcriptions to reduce personal bias in interview recording transcription. By doing these steps, you can ensure that the data are interpreted objectively and that the conclusions are based on the data rather than the researcher's personal opinions.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to identify strategies that Black males have used to persist past their 1st year in college. The participants selected for this study shared the strategies that have helped them persist beyond their 1st year at the community college in a southeastern state. From the participants' responses, a better understanding of the strategies used for persistence emerged. Based on the research question that guided this study, semistructured interview questions that explored students' strategies for persistence beyond their 1st year at a community college were developed.

Six themes emerged from the participants' responses to the interview questions. These included factors or influences that motivated continued enrollment, factors that contributed to academic success, and student support programs. These themes supported

the research question. I will offer an analysis of the results in Chapter 5. I discuss the limitations and reliability of the study and offer suggestions for additional research. I talk about how the study's conclusions could lead to more social change and offer suggestions for boosting persistence at community colleges in southeastern states.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to identify strategies that Black males have used to persist past their 1st year in college. A qualitative approach was used to conduct this study and to uncover the strategies the participants used to persist beyond their 1st year at the community college. The research question that directed this study was the following: What are the strategies of 1st-year African American male students that contributed to their decision to persist at the community college?

The participants in the study were asked interview questions about the strategies they used that helped them persist at the community college. From the findings, six themes emerged: family and community factors that influence persistence, self-efficacy factors that influence persistence, academic factors that influence persistence, perceptions of community college that influence student decisions, academic barriers that influence student persistence, and personal barriers that influence student persistence.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I interpret the findings as confirmation and disconfirmation and add them to the knowledge about student persistence in higher education. My interpretation of the data considers the literature and the conceptual framework on which this study was based.

Findings and the Literature

Findings related to elements highlighted in the literature explain why participants chose to persist beyond their 1st year at the community college. I address the themes of family and community factors that influence persistence, self-efficacy factors that

influence persistence, academic factors that influence persistence, perceptions of community college that influence student decisions, academic barriers that influence student persistence, and personal barriers that influence student persistence. Chapter 4 went into greater detail on these topics. In the following sections, I examine what these discoveries confirmed, disconfirmed, and added to the literature.

Confirm

When the participants were asked what factors influenced their decision to persist and continue enrollment, participants' responses indicated four factors or influences. The findings confirmed the literature addressing family and community, self-efficacy, academic factors, and the perceptions of the community college. The data aligned with Tinto's model of student departure. Tinto's model, focusing on higher education settings, emphasizes the significance of social and academic integration for student retention and success (Tinto, 1970). It suggests that the more students integrate into an institution's social and academic systems, the less likely they are to depart before completing their degree. For example, the participants in this study highlighted the motivational role of family, community, and personal connections in their educational journey. For instance, Participant 1 discussed drawing motivation from his family and community, mainly aiming to overcome systemic barriers. This reflects research by Bratton (2018) and Martin (2017), highlighting the importance of understanding African American males' specific challenges and needs in the educational system, particularly at community colleges and PWIs.

Each participant's comments aligned directly with the theme of self-efficacy factors that influence persistence, albeit in different aspects of the challenges and responses highlighted in the research literature. Participant 6's emphasis on internal drive and perseverance also resonates with the need for resilience in the face of the significant external challenges African American males encounter in community college settings. Harris et al. (2017) indicated that these students often face numerous environmental factors, such as employment demands and family care obligations, which require a strong internal motivation to overcome, as mentioned by Participant 6. Lastly, Participant 10's focus on persistence and not giving up despite hardships aligns with the necessity to navigate environmental pressures such as food insecurity, transportation issues, and the high rate of external responsibilities discussed in the studies by Wood and Harris (2017) and others. This underscores the critical role of maintaining personal resolve and motivation in the face of systemic and individual challenges.

The provided participant data align well with the academic literature on the challenges and support systems for African American males in community colleges. Participant 4's account of needing help and Participant 7's positive experience with tutoring services resonate with the themes of academic challenges faced by African American males, as discussed by Brown and Sacco-Bene (2018). This study emphasized the necessity of support systems, such as tutoring, to help students who arrive academically behind and may require remedial courses, which can delay their progress. Participant 8's mention of a welcoming and diverse community aligns with the need for supportive environments highlighted in the literature. Such communities can help

mitigate the negative impact of students' academic and social challenges, which Moss (2019) suggested is crucial for retention and success. The memorable interaction shared by Participant 6 reflects the importance of nonacademic support staff in motivating students, which can be essential for students who are struggling academically and socially on campus. This kind of support can help reduce withdrawal rates and improve academic performance, addressing issues outlined by Tinto (1975). Participant 3's discussion on the benefits of mentorship and structured support groups ties directly into the academic literature's emphasis on structured academic support as a critical factor in student retention and success, as Moss (2019) noted.

The experiences shared by the participants reflect themes similar to those identified in the research conducted by Brooms and Davis (2017), Beale et al. (2019), and Burney (2018), particularly regarding the importance of support systems, mentoring, and peer relationships in fostering academic success among African American male students. Participant 11's narrative, where his perspective shifted positively after attending a community college, aligns with the findings of Burney (2018) and Brooms and Davis (2017). Burney highlighted how mentoring can make African American male students feel appreciated and more confident in their academic abilities. Brooms and Davis pointed out connections with faculty and peers, particularly other African American individuals, in supporting students' persistence. Participant 11's experience underscores the value of supportive educational environments and mentoring in helping students overcome doubts and succeed. Participant 2's experience, where he recognized the value of community college as a preparatory step for the university, could be viewed through

the lens of Broome and Davis's findings on the importance of peer relationships and faculty connections. These elements help ease the transition into higher education environments, providing a network that supports understanding and integration, thus better-preparing students for future academic challenges. Participant 6's journey from viewing community colleges negatively due to societal stigma to understanding their value reflects Beale et al.'s (2019) research themes. This study highlights that despite challenges and prevalent dropout rates, many African American male students can achieve significant educational outcomes when supported appropriately. Participant 6's change in perception could indicate overcoming initial barriers through increased awareness and perhaps informal support systems that challenge the prevailing negative stereotypes.

In summary, the data illustrate the crucial role of social and academic integration in the educational persistence model proposed by Tinto. The data revealed how family, community, personal motivation, and engagement with institutional support systems contribute to their persistence in education, aligning well with Tinto's model of student departure.

Disconfirm

When the participants were asked about the barriers that influenced their persistence, their responses revealed five barriers. The findings disconfirmed the literature addressing time management, procrastination, writing, test anxiety, and age. Effective time management is crucial for college students, as poor scheduling and prioritization can lead to overwhelming stress and academic burnout. This strain can

hinder their persistence, increasing the likelihood of dropping out or underperforming academically. In a Napoles et al. (2023) study, effective time management was closely linked to college students' academic performance and stress levels. Students who manage their time effectively experience less academic stress and achieve better academic outcomes. Participants 8, 3, and 10 all highlighted the significant challenges they faced in balancing academics, work, and personal responsibilities while attending community college. Participant 9 underscored the difficulty of managing full-time education, home duties, and helping others, emphasizing the importance of seeking advice to manage stress and prevent dropping out. Participant 3 shared his struggles with effective time management, pointing out how juggling his coursework, part-time job, and additional responsibilities posed academic challenges. Lastly, Participant 10 discussed the ongoing struggle with time management as a significant barrier to his success, detailing how his efforts to balance work, family commitments, and schoolwork often led to last-minute or missed assignments, impacting his academic performance. Collectively, their experiences underscore the critical need for effective time management and support systems to successfully navigate the demands of community college.

The second barrier, procrastination, is the habit of delaying tasks. It can significantly undermine college students' ability to persist in their studies by disrupting their time management and increasing their stress levels. Procrastination is considered destructive because the cost of such behavior may cause psychological stress due to overexertion to meet deadlines (Araya-Castillo et al., 2023). Participant 11 discussed his challenge with procrastination during his time at community college, where he often

delayed assignments, negatively impacting his grades. To overcome this, he set goals to complete his work earlier in the week, specifically by Wednesday. This adjustment helped him better manage his studies while working part-time with his father. Through goal setting, Participant 11 addressed his procrastination and illustrated how deliberate time management can significantly enhance academic success and well-being for students.

Writing is the third barrier that influences student persistence. Writing-intensive coursework can be a significant barrier to persistence for college students, as the demands of frequent, complex assignments can lead to stress and burnout. Additionally, students who struggle with writing skills may feel overwhelmed and inadequate, increasing the likelihood of disengagement and dropout. Ericksen (2022) stated that students lacking the academic skills necessary to keep up at the collegiate level can negatively affect retention rates. Participant 6 discussed their struggle with writing during college, acknowledging it as a personal weakness and regret over not having access to writing tutoring services available today. They reflected on the lack of resources in their time and indicated that they would have sought help to improve their writing skills if given the option. The participant's experience shows the importance of utilizing available academic resources to address personal challenges and enhance learning outcomes.

For Participant 8, test anxiety was a barrier that influenced his persistence. Test anxiety can significantly undermine the academic persistence of college students by eroding their confidence and impairing their ability to perform under exam conditions. This heightened stress affects their test scores, can discourage continued enrollment, and

affects their educational journey. Boustani (2023) claimed the term *test anxiety* encapsulates the intense fear and stress students experience when facing exams, which can lead to diminished test performance and adversely affect their mental health. Participant 8 described their significant struggle with test anxiety that persisted from high school, explaining that their nervousness would increase as the exam time neared, impacting their class performance. To manage this anxiety, they adopted a strategy of positive self-talk, encouraging themselves to believe in their ability to succeed. Additionally, they approached exams by tackling easier problems, reducing the initial stress, and building confidence before moving on to more complex questions. This systematic approach helped them better manage their test anxiety and improve their performance.

As the demographic landscape of higher education shifts, the age of students emerges as a critical factor influencing the college experience. Traditional students, typically entering college straight from high school, face challenges different from those encountered by nontraditional students, who often return to education later in life. This age disparity can create a range of obstacles for older students, from cultural and social integration difficulties on campuses predominantly populated by younger individuals to the academic adjustments required after years away from a structured learning environment. Furthermore, the rapid advancement of educational technologies poses an additional barrier, requiring nontraditional students to adapt to new learning tools and methods quickly. Participant 7 highlighted difficulties when resuming education later in life, especially at age 66. Having been away from a school environment for many years,

they emphasized that their most significant obstacle was catching up with current academic standards and pace.

Tinto's theory (1988), while comprehensive in addressing student integration and persistence in higher education, does not specifically focus on age as a variable that influences the student experience and success. Nontraditional students may experience difficulties integrating into the campus community, as they might not relate to the experiences and lifestyles of younger, traditional students. Additionally, nontraditional students may face academic challenges when they return to education after a significant break, requiring different support systems than younger students. *The Yale Ledger* (2023) stated that adult learners must adapt to new technologies due to the everchanging learning environment, which can be achieved through institutional resources and self-learning.

The study illuminated the intricate web of barriers that community college students face, ranging from time management and procrastination to writing difficulties, test anxiety, and age-related challenges. These findings challenge the existing literature and highlight the pressing need for tailored support systems that address these diverse hurdles. The voices of the participants, vividly sharing their struggles, serve as a compelling call for educational institutions to implement robust measures that can aid students in overcoming these obstacles. Community colleges can enhance student persistence and success by fostering an environment that supports effective time management, provides resources for academic challenges, and accommodates the unique needs of both traditional and nontraditional students. This study underscores the critical

role of understanding and addressing the barriers that impede student success, paving the way for more inclusive and supportive educational practices.

Contributions to the Literature

The literature review on Tinto's theory of student departure and the experiences of African American male students in community colleges opens several avenues for further research and contributions. One potential area is expanding Tinto's model to include contemporary challenges such as digital learning, mental health issues, and the influence of social media on student retention. Another vital area is exploring intersectionality, particularly how race, gender, and other identities intersect and impact the educational journey of African American male students. Moreover, an in-depth analysis of mentorship programs specifically designed for African American male students in community colleges could shed light on their effectiveness. The role of technology and online learning environments is also crucial, particularly in understanding how technology and online learning support or hinder these students' academic success. Tuiloma et al. (2022) contended that supporting student engagement is central in online courses, as the online environment more easily lends itself to issues of isolation and barriers to technology.

Conceptual Framework

Incorporating Tinto's student departure theory, I explored how it lays the foundation for comprehending the strategies employed by African American male students to persist beyond their 1st year at the community college successfully. Tinto's student departure theory offers a comprehensive framework to understand why students

leave college before completing their degrees. Central to this model are concepts like academic integration, which emphasizes the importance of academic performance and engagement, and social integration, highlighting the necessity for students to form social connections and a sense of belonging within the college community. The theory also considers the impact of background characteristics, including family educational history and socioeconomic status, on students' college experience. Crucially, Tinto pointed out the role of individual goals and commitment, noting that a student's dedication to their education objectives and the institution plays a significant role in their likelihood to persist. Furthermore, institutional experiences, such as positive interactions with faculty and staff, reinforce students' commitment to their education. Tinto's model culminates in the understanding that the decision to leave college is complex and multifaceted, influenced by academic, social, and personal factors.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study contributed to understanding African American male students' strategies to persist beyond their 1st year, it was limited to certain aspects. In this study, which examined the strategies that helped African American male students persist beyond their 1st year in community colleges, employing more than one research question would have significantly enhanced the depth and comprehensiveness of the findings. One research question could have focused on identifying these students' specific challenges, while the other could have investigated the effectiveness of various support systems. This dual approach would have allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the barriers and the aids to persistence, providing a balanced view of the

student experience. Additionally, the scope of the study would have been greatly enhanced by including community colleges from various regions. Different regions in the United States have diverse socioeconomic, cultural, and educational landscapes, which can impact student experiences and outcomes. By studying a more geographically diverse sample, the researcher could have identified regional variations in challenges and successful strategies, providing a more comprehensive understanding of factors influencing African American male student persistence.

Recommendations

Building upon the comprehensive literature review and considering the identified limitations in studying the persistence of African American male students beyond their 1st year in community colleges, several recommendations for further research are essential. First, additional research should be conducted that explores different dimensions of African American male students' experiences, such as the impact of faculty and staff support, the role of financial capital, and the influence of external factors like family and employment. Additionally, incorporating geographical diversity by including community colleges from various regions would enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide a richer understanding of regional differences in student experiences and institutional strategies.

Longitudinal studies are also recommended to capture the dynamic nature of student persistence, tracking students over time to understand how their interactions with academic and social systems evolve. Comparative analysis between community colleges and other institutions, such as 4-year colleges, could offer valuable insights into

community colleges' unique challenges and strengths in supporting African American male students.

Nonacademic factors, including social integration and extracurricular activities, should also be explored to provide a more comprehensive view of what influences persistence beyond academic performance. Investigating the role of technology and innovative educational strategies could offer new insights into enhancing learning experiences and engagement. Finally, assessing how institutional policies and practices facilitate or hinder the persistence of African American male students would provide valuable data to inform policy changes. By addressing these areas, future research can build on existing knowledge, address gaps, and contribute to developing more effective strategies to support African American male students in community colleges.

Implications

The potential impact of research into the strategies used by African American males to persist beyond their 1st year in community colleges is profound and multifaceted, spanning individual, family, organizational, and societal levels. At the individual level, such research can significantly enhance African American male students' educational experiences and outcomes. Tailored support informed by this research could improve academic achievement, bolster self-confidence, and better career prospects, fostering personal growth and self-efficacy. On the family level, the success of these students can positively impact their entire families. Higher educational attainment often leads to improved job opportunities and financial stability, which benefits families.

These students can also serve as role models for younger family members, instilling a culture that values education and perseverance.

At the organizational level, particularly within community colleges, insights from this research can guide the development of more effective policies and supportive programs. This can result in higher retention and graduation rates among African American male students, enhancing these educational institutions' overall effectiveness and reputation. Finally, at the societal level, the broader impact is substantial. Elevating the educational attainment of African American males contributes to a more educated workforce, which is essential for economic growth and global competitiveness. Furthermore, addressing educational disparities is a critical step toward social justice and equity, promoting a more inclusive and understanding society. This holistic approach helps break down stereotypes and plays a crucial role in reducing racial and economic inequalities. Thus, research into the persistence strategies of African American male students in community colleges drives positive social change, benefiting individuals, families, educational institutions, and society.

Conclusion

The study on the persistence strategies of Black male students in their 1st year of community college yielded a powerful conclusion: The key to their continued enrollment and academic success lies in a complex interplay of personal motivation, academic support systems, and a conducive college environment. This research confirms existing literature on the importance of self-motivation, mentorship, and supportive college atmospheres, particularly in the context of Black male students. Challenges such as

financial constraints, transportation issues, and balancing academic and home responsibilities are significant, yet these students persist through internal drive and external support. Academic challenges like time management, writing difficulties, and test anxiety are addressed through tailored support services. The study also revealed unique challenges, such as speech impediments and age-related factors, which are not extensively covered in existing literature, suggesting new avenues for research and support.

Institutional factors, including faculty support, student-friendly environments, and flexible scheduling, are pivotal to student persistence. Community colleges are not just educational institutions; they are gateways to better job opportunities, personal growth, and preparation for advanced education. This study underlines the need for comprehensive support systems that cater to the diverse needs of students, especially those from minority backgrounds. It highlights the critical role of community colleges in not just imparting education but in shaping lives and careers, emphasizing their value in higher education and society.

The implications of this research are profound, suggesting that enhancing support systems and understanding the unique challenges faced by Black male students can lead to more effective educational strategies, higher retention rates, and, ultimately, a more inclusive and equitable society. The success of these students impacts not only their individual lives but also their families, communities, and the broader societal fabric. Therefore, this study is a call to action for educational institutions, policymakers, and society to invest in and prioritize the success of Black male students in community

colleges, recognizing their potential and the value they bring to the educational ecosystem and beyond.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

**ATTENTION:
BLACK MALE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS**



About the Study

- One 45 minute Zoom interview
- To protect your privacy, no names will be collected

Requirements

- African American male community college student
- Persisted beyond the first year

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of first-year African American male students that have contributed to their decision to persist at the community college.



If you are interested in participating in a research study about experiences of African American male community college students, please contact **Mr. Mark Coleman** at mark.coleman2@waldenu.edu.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

1. Before enrolling at your current institution, what were your thoughts about community colleges?
2. What is your major?
3. Are you enrolled part-time or full-time?
4. What are your short-term and long-term educational and career goals?
5. What factors or influences motivated you as an African American male student to continue to enroll in classes as a community college student?
6. What barriers have you had to face that has had an effect on your persistence at the community college?
7. What factors contributed to your academic success while attending the community college? Did you experience any academic challenges? If so, how did you deal with them?
8. How would you describe your relationship with the faculty members on campus? Did you notice a change in your relationship with the faculty members during your first year at the college? Was it strengthened, weakened, etc.? If so, how?
9. To what extent was your family (spouse, children, parents, etc.) involved in your life as a community college student?
10. Name all of the student support programs offered on campus at your institution that you have been aware of since enrolling. How have these programs helped you persist in college?

11. What additional forms of support (on and off campus) that have aided in your success (educational, emotional, and social) as you work towards graduation?
12. What strategies have you learned from the various support systems helping you continue working toward graduation that you feel would benefit other African American male students at the institution?
13. Reflecting on your time at the institution, what are some things you would like to see changed?