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Strategies for Addressing Junior College Attrition Among Female African American Nontraditional Students

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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2025

Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Female African American nontraditional students (25+ years with family and work demands) have high attrition rates, they leave degree programs before graduating, worsening socioeconomic disparities. This phenomenological study described their experiences with support services, which shaped student self-efficacy related to completing programs, and identified what changes were needed to improve support for higher graduation rates among female African American nontraditional students participating in 2-year degree programs offered by junior colleges. Guided by Bean's industrial model of student attrition and Fishbein and Aizen's importance of intention model, the study posed two research questions: What are the lived experiences of female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs, particularly regarding the support services offered to them by their schools, and what support services and resources do female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs describe as value-adding and necessary to reduce their attrition rates? Eight participants were recruited via social media and interviewed through Microsoft Teams. Content analysis revealed four key themes: Good access to support services that meet the school's needs, moderate-to-poor access to support services that address students' needs, barriers to graduation, and what students think would support graduation success. Findings suggest that aligning support services with the lived realities of nontraditional students can reduce attrition and foster positive social change. Educational leaders are encouraged to redesign interventions that reflect students' practical needs and lived experiences.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

African American women face socioeconomic challenges that are unique to them. The reason they have unique experiences is because of the effects of intersectionality. Intersectionality is when a subgroup has unique experiences with discrimination because they have multiple marginalization traits (Seng et al., 2012). African American women have both sex/gender and race marginalization, as well as discrimination created by being an African American woman (Seng et al., 2012). Intersectionality becomes more severe with each additional trait of disadvantage (Haynes et al., 2020). When African American women become nontraditional students, they add new dynamics of disadvantage. The goal of the project is to gain first-hand knowledge of how well services offered by junior colleges are supporting the needs of female African American nontraditional students in two-year degree programs, so that more effective interventions can be implemented to promote higher graduation rates. Chapter One provides an overview of the infrastructure for the project, including statement of the problem, purpose of the study, the need for the study, the research questions posed, the theoretical construct for the project, the nature of the study, definitions of key terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Problem Statement

There is a high rate of attrition among female African American nontraditional students, particularly in two-year junior college degree programs (Green, 2023; Jones, 2023), which prompted me to investigate the situation. The lower graduation rates among members of this group make socioeconomic disparities worse (Aina et al., 2022; Clark &

Shi, 2020; McDaniel & Van Jura, 2022). Additionally, the debt accumulated by many of these students to complete a degree program at a junior college creates financial liabilities that make women who have not graduated in a dire situation where they are in debt and with little ways to repay it (Anderson, 2019; Deckard et al., 2022; Martin & Dwyer, 2021). Defaulting on student loans hurts their credit score, which impacts their ability to get jobs that require a credit check as part of the screening process, to finance a home, and to qualify for bank accounts and credit cards (Portis, 2020; Xiao et al., 2020). Additionally, the socioeconomic struggles they face are distressing, as they continue to pay for a degree they do not have, leaving them without the ability to secure the job they enrolled in the degree program for in the first place. As these problems accumulate, they hinder their quality of life and ability to earn a reasonable living, while also damaging their self-esteem and self-efficacy (Portis, 2020; Xiao et al., 2020).

Although researchers have investigated this issue, there is a general lack of research conducted on the phenomenon of female African American nontraditional students' junior college attrition, its cause, and what these students need to overcome attrition risks. Since this group is impacted by intersectionality issues, they are more vulnerable to challenges that are likely to interfere with their abilities to complete their degree or certificate programs, leaving them with a significant need for assistance (Aina et al., 2022; Clark & Shi, 2020; McDaniel & Van Jura, 2022; Seng et al., 2012). The gap in the literature also leaves space for understanding what-nontraditional-aged African American women believe they need to support their abilities to complete their programs of study successfully, as most of the studies that are available collect data from education

administrators, not the students themselves (Aina et al., 2022; Clark & Shi, 2020; McDaniel & Van Jura, 2022; Seng et al., 2012). The specific research problem addressed through this study was the lack of first-hand knowledge available about what female African American nontraditional students need, in terms of support services and resources, to enhance their abilities to graduate from two-year junior college degree programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe experiences with support services and to suggest changes to improve support for higher graduation rates among female African American nontraditional students participating in two-year degree programs offered by junior colleges. The specific research design included phenomenological inquiry. The selected approach was based on the work of Carreora and Lopes (2021) and Zach (2020). The current study examined the lived experiences of female African American nontraditional students attending junior college programs.

Need for the Study

The current study is significant in that it addresses the gap of knowledge of what female African American nontraditional junior college students believe they need to support the successful completion of their degree program. This knowledge was needed because nontraditional students, in general, have not been asked what support they want and need, and African American women tend to be ignored by researchers because of the social blindness created by intersectionality (Aina et al., 2022; Anderson, 2019; Clark & Shi, 2020; Deckard et al., 2022; McDaniel & Van Jura, 2022; Seng et al., 2012). This

study not only made this population visible, but also *included* women in the population in the decision-making process for academic and other support and resources offered to students. These consequences promoted three positive social changes: (1) gave African American women with nontraditional student status a voice through inclusion, (2) provided them with support and resources that they will benefit from using, and (3) aimed to improve the graduation rate of members of this population so that they have a better chance to improve their socioeconomic position in society.

Research Questions

In the current study, I investigated the phenomenon of female African American nontraditional students attending junior college programs with the intent of answering the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs, particularly regarding the support services offered to them by their schools?

RQ2: What support services and resources do female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs describe as value-adding and necessary to reduce their attrition rates?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework for the Study

The theoretical framework for the study was Bean's Industrial Model of Student Attrition (Bean, 1981). This model established the variables and the relationship between variables used to understand the experiences with support services that female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs and how they

impact their attrition rates. The variables identified were intentions, values, self-efficacy, and socialization (Bean, 1981). Building on this framework, a conceptual model was built using the Importance of Intention Model, created by Fishbein and Aizen (1975). This model had two paths of influence on a person's intentions. The first path was influenced by social components in the person's life, including beliefs and motivation. The second path was influenced by personal components, including perceived consequences of an action and the evaluation of those consequences (Fishbein & Aizen, 1975). These concepts helped to develop the Bean (1981) model, providing a comprehensive framework that aligns with the study's goals and objectives.

Nature of the Study

I used qualitative methodology to describe the experiences that female nontraditional African American students have in junior college program. Specifically, the study seeks an understanding of what support they are offered by two-year junior college degree programs and where gaps exist between what these students perceive they need to support their degree program completion and what is offered by the institutions of higher education. The qualitative study design selected to explore the experiences of female nontraditional African American students attending two-year junior college degree programs is phenomenology. Phenomenology seeks to find the essence of a phenomenon, which it does by studying the phenomenon via direct observations and interactions with people who are experiencing the phenomenon in real time (Van Manen, 2016). The type of phenomenology selected for the study was phenomenology of

sociality, which seeks to understand how social interactions and dynamics impact perceptions of the targeted phenomenon (Hegel et al., 1977).

Definitions

The following are definitions for terms used throughout this study:

African American: A racial classification associated with Americans that have African ancestry (Jackson, 2023).

Female: The biological sex of a human determined by having two X chromosomes, or a gender associated with having socially defined female traits (Hirschon, 2020).

Intersectionality: The unique discrimination experienced by people who have multiple traits of discrimination, such as being and African American women (Aina et al., 2022; Anderson, 2019; Clark & Shi, 2020; Deckard et al., 2022; McDaniel & Van Jura, 2022; Seng et al., 2012).

Junior college: An institution of higher education that offers courses, certificates, and 2-year degree programs (King, 2022).

Nontraditional student: A student who does not conform to the traditional profile of being 18 to 25, single, no children, and with few personal responsibilities (Kamer & Ishitani, 2021).

Phenomenon: An event, experience, or thing that is unique (Haynie, 2019).

Assumptions

The current study had two primary assumptions. The first assumption was that female nontraditional African American students enrolled in junior college two-year

degree programs have unique experiences related to the level of support they receive. This assumption was based on observations about the intersectionality effects that impact this population's daily lives (Aina et al., 2022; Anderson, 2019; Clark & Shi, 2020; Deckard et al., 2022; McDaniel & Van Jura, 2022; Seng et al., 2012). It was reasonable to assume that if intersectionality impacts this group's daily lives, that it would also impact their experiences in higher education.

The second assumption associated with this study was that support services were a predictive factor of degree program attrition among female nontraditional African American students. This assumption was based on the constructs and variables found within the study's theoretical and conceptual frameworks. These frameworks were based on Bean's Industrial Model of Student Attrition (Bean, 1981) and Fishbein and Aizen's (1975) Importance of Intention Model. These models supported the second assumption.

Scope and Delimitations

To keep the scope of the study reasonable, it was important to constrain the sample to include only students twho were easily accessible by the researcher. Therefore, students were only sampled from the researcher's community. The size of the sample was also small to facilitate the intense interviewing process required for a phenomenological study. Subsequently, the sample size was limited to eight to ten individuals. Finally, since the study only focused on female nontraditional African American students from junior college two-year degree programs, the diversity of participants will be limited to people who have all these qualities.

Limitations

Time and money were typical limitations of student research, and these were limitations of this study as well. These limits were mediated by effective time and resource management. They were addressed using the resources and support offered by the researcher's school. Personal bias was a major limitation for the study. It was hard to eliminate all personal biases, especially when the researcher and the participants have grown up and are assimilated into a dominant culture where race, sex, and socioeconomic status significantly impact social status, access to resources, and treatment. Self-serving bias was another issue to mitigate. The self-serving bias was a problematic cognitive construct that attributes success or failure to either internal or external factors depending on how closely the researcher identifies with the research subject (Amasino et al., 2023). For example, if the researcher closely identified with the research subject, he/she was more likely to attribute success to the subject's internal factors, and failure to external factors, while the researcher will be more likely to attribute success to external factors and failure to internal factors when the research does not closely identify with the research subject. Another issue to be aware of was retrospective biasing, which was when the researcher or research subject evaluates the past more favorably than they would the same situation if it was occurring right now (Yamagata & Miura, 2023). To minimize the problem of researcher self-serving and retrospective biases, I practiced mindfulness to ensure I was aware of my personal biases, opinions about the study population and sample, and reactions to participants, so I could alter my behavior and thought patterns to keep them as objective and neutral as possible.

I also implemented bracketing strategies during the interviewing and data analysis. Bracketing is when the researcher implements strategies to remain aware of his/her biases, so that they do not impact or degrade data collection or analysis (Dörfler & Stierand, 2021). I used bracketing by adding a statement to the top of my interviewing and data analysis protocols to keep myself aware of things that could bias my response to the participants and their data. For example, I needed to remind myself that I am a nontraditional female student, so I came to this research project with preexisting ideas about what this identity is and how it impacts student experiences and performance. During data analysis, I posted a similar bracketing statement at the top of my data collection instruments, to remind myself to neutralize my opinions before completing the phenomenological analysis of my research.

Significance

The significance of the current study rests in the potential to solve several socioeconomic problems. First, the findings from the study identified potential intervention points that junior colleges can use to implement services that will help promote higher graduation rates among all its students, including female nontraditional African American students. Second, the findings helped to improve the level of support possible for female nontraditional African American students receive in support of their completion of their two-year degree programs. Degree completion was essential for creating opportunities for these women to qualify for better paying positions, to attain gainful employment, and to improve their quality of life and the quality of life of their families. Third, the current study had the potential to create awareness of factors that are

widening socioeconomic disparities related to academic, social, and financial success for female nontraditional African American students.

Summary

A high rate of attrition among female African American nontraditional students in two-year junior college degree programs necessitated a qualitative inquiry. The purpose of this inquiry was to describe experiences with support services and to suggest change to improve support for higher graduation rates among female nontraditional African American students participating in two-year degree programs offered by junior colleges. This study was significant as it filled the gap of knowledge related to what the target population believe they need to support the successful completion of their degree programs. The research questions posed were (a) What are the lived experiences of female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs, particularly regarding the support services offered to them by their schools? and (b) What support services and resources do female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs suggest are value-adding and necessary to reduce their attrition rates? The theoretical framework for the study was Bean's (1981) Industrial Model of Student Attrition and Fishbein and Aizen's (1975) Importance of Intentions Model.

I conducted a qualitative inquiry utilizing the phenomenology of sociality, which involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews to collect data. The assumptions associated with the study were that female nontraditional African American students enrolled in junior college two-year degree programs have unique experiences related to the level of support they receive at school, and support services are a predictive factor for degree

program attrition among female nontraditional African American student attending two-year degree programs at a junior college. The scope of the study was constrained to female nontraditional African American students enrolled in two-year degree programs offered by junior colleges in the researcher's community, and the sample size was limited to eight to ten participants. The study's limitations included time, money, and personal bias. This study is significant as it has the potential to contribute to the solution of several socioeconomic problems, including disparities in access to higher education support services, high attrition rates among the target population, and financial and professional success disparities associated with the study population. The next chapter of the proposal provides a review of the literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is a high rate of attrition among female African American nontraditional students, particularly in two-year junior college degree programs (Green, 2023; Jones, 2023; Riley, 2021; Shapiro et al., 2019; Stephen et al., 2020; Weiss et al., 2021), which prompted me to investigate the situation. Since a large portion of these students are minorities, women, and socioeconomically marginalized individuals, the lower graduation rates are making socioeconomic disparities among African American women more significant (Okpych & Courtney, 2021; Stephen et al., 2020; Weiss et al., 2019). Additionally, for those students that accumulate student debt while completing a degree program at a junior college, significant financial liabilities can create a dire situation where they have tens of thousands of dollars in debt and no way to repay it (Goldrick-Rab & Steinbaum, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020).

If female African American nontraditional students default on their student loans, this has a negative impact on their credit score, which impacts their ability to get some jobs that required a credit check as part of the screening process, to finance a home, and to qualify for bank accounts and credit cards (Ji, 2021). While everyone that defaults on a student loan can experience these financial problems, the consequences are worse for African American women because they are already more likely to be turned down for home loans (Giacoletti et al., 2023) and home improvement loans (Michaels et al., 2022), discriminated against during employment selection processes (Nkimbeng et al., 2021; Ritchey, 2023; Smith, 2023), and evaluated more stringently and more likely to get

subprime rates when they apply for certain debt products, like credit cards and business loans (Atkinson, 2020; Chen & Duffy, 2022; Rucks-Ahidiana & Kaly, 2023).

Barriers to successful applications in these things can have a negative impact on African American women's quality of life. Additionally, Ji (2021, para. 6) noted that having excessive student debt can "induce[] agents to take less search risk by accepting a job more quickly, which is more likely to be lower paid." Another problem created by student debt without a degree is socioeconomic hardships (Ji, 2021). The hardships are caused by having more current liabilities than incoming revenue because the individual does not quality for jobs they went to school to get, yet they continue to pay student loan payments (Ji, 2021). As these problems mount, it can inhibit their quality of life and ability to make a reasonable living, as well as having a negative impact on their self-esteem and self-efficacy (Festa & Knotts, 2021; Norvilitis & Linn, 2021). For these reasons, as well as others, there is a critical need to learn more about what can support the degree completion rates of female African American nontraditional students.

In this chapter, I review the literature on topics that build up the theoretical, conceptual, and knowledge foundation for the study. It covers the theoretical construct for the study, the population being studied, and the problem being studied. The keywords and databases searched included Google Scholar Database and PsychINFO: *nontraditional students, nontraditional student attrition, women and degree completion, minorities and degree completion, online learning success, online learning experiences, female African American nontraditional students, graduation needs of nontraditional students, African*

American nontraditional students in community college, and *female African American nontraditional student attrition*. The objective of the literature review is to describe what is known about the problem, where there is agreement and disagreement among researchers, and what gaps exist that the proposed study can fill.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories ground this study of female African American nontraditional students in community college programs. They are Bean's Industrial Model of Student Attrition (Bean, 1981) and the Importance of Intention Model (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Bean's Industrial Model of Student Attrition provides the variables and the formula for degree program attrition, and the Importance of Intention Model provides a more detailed description and discussion of how intention, as a variable, impacts the student attrition predictive model offered by Bean (Bean, 1981; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Bean's Industrial Model of Student Attrition

Bean's Industrial Model of Student Attrition evolved out of the perceived lack of theoretical models for describing student attrition back in the 1980s (Bean, 1981). John P. Bean built off the work done by Rootman (1972), Spady (1970), and Tinto (1975) dealing with issues of withdrawal from a commitment to precede in some activity. While not directly related to college student attrition, the models Bean drew from showed common themes, such as the importance of intentions and self-efficacy in deciding when to withdraw from a key activity. These themes were seen across contexts, including leaving a profession or job, committing suicide, and leaving a relationship. Bean (1981) looked

for common traits in these models and built what he coined as a ‘synthetic model’ of what had been designed by other researchers.

The first element of Bean’s model comes from Spady’s suicidality model, which was based on the work done by Durkheim. From this model, Bean acknowledged the relationship between suicidality and group-value sharing (Bean, 1981). Bean’s model recognizes that people are less likely to detach or withdraw from group-approved activity if they share the same values as the group. When applied to student attrition, the prediction made is that attrition occurs because of having different values from group promoting the value of completing a degree program (Bean, 1981). This draws into the discussion the role that racism, sexism, agism, and intersectionality play in disconnecting nontraditional students who are African American women pursuing a degree from a community college (Aina et al., 2022; Anderson, 2019; Clark & Shi, 2020; Deckard et al., 2022; McDaniel & Van Jura, 2022; Seng et al., 2012). The disconnect between this student population and the group promoting the value of degree completion, as explained by the relationship described by Durkheim and Spady, would make African American women who are nontraditional students extremely vulnerable to program attrition because they do not feel a sense of shared values and/or identities (Bean, 1981).

The second element adopted by Bean’s model came from Rootman’s (1972) research on adult socialization. This study showed that student attrition at the United States Coast Guard Academy resulted from what Bean (1981, p. 5) called a “failure of the adult socialization process.” Adult socialization is when members within a group socialize with an incoming member to fit within the group according to group values and

expectations. When done effectively, the incoming member adjusts so that there is a strong person-group-fit. This status supports the individual's performance within the group, provides the person with more satisfaction with his/her role within that group, and enhances his/her self-efficacy for success (Rootman, 1972). As applied to the current study, adult socialization plays a role in the target population's student attrition by failing to help the student assimilate to the academic community at a level that makes the student to access protective factors, such as a sense of belongingness, self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy in their degree program.

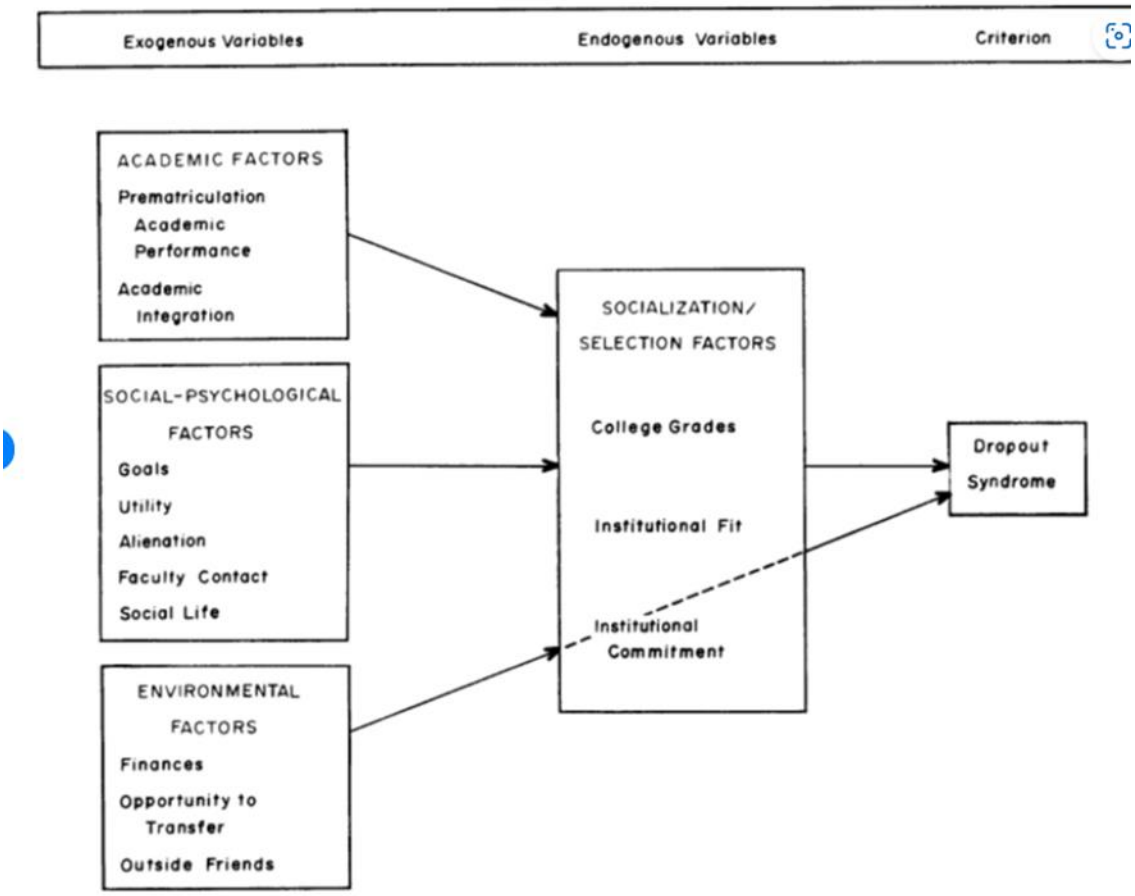
The third model Bean (1981) borrowed from was Sewell and Hauser (1972) model of status attainment. This was a path model which showed how eleven independent variables impacted a person's educational achievement. Based on their research, the variables that impact a student's academic achievement were: family academic achievement trends, parental income, peer plans, college plans, occupational aspirations, and performance in high school. The findings from this study indicated that the most impactful variables of academic achievement were having college plans and high school academic performance (Sewell & Hauser, 1972). Bean's model considered the impact that a person's drive for status attainment had on his/her intentions to complete a degree program or to drop out. As this element relates to the current study, the suggestion is that status attainment either is not a drive for African American women who are nontraditional students, or that there is some barrier that is negatively impacting their self-efficacy for status attainment via degree completion.

The third model integrated into Bean's Theoretical Model of Student Attrition was Tinto's (1975) Synthetic Model Based on Research Literature. This linear model projects student commitment to achievement based on the relationship between several independent variables (Tinto, 1975). Bean (1981) adopted this linear model, but changes which variables were used and how the variables were related to each other. As it relates to the current study, this aspect of the model's development will be used to show how different contributory factors influence the target student population's commitment to degree completion at a specific point in time.

Bean's (1981) original model of student attrition was the Synthetic Causal Model of Student Attrition. This model showed that a student's background impacted the quality of interaction that he/she had with the institutional of higher education and the learning environment, which then impacted student outcomes and attitudes, which then impacted the student's intent to complete a degree program, and finally, resulted in whether or not the student dropped out or completed the degree program (Bean, 1981). Bean later revised the model with the help of Barabara Metzner in 1985, creating the more recent model called the *Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition*. This model added into the equation of student attrition, social-psychological factors, such as stress (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Figure 1 shows the more elegant and comprehensive design which illustrates the conceptualization of the following causal sequence formula: Object (situation) -> perception (cognitive function) = judgment (value statement) (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition (Bean & Metzner, 1985)



Note. From "A Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition," by J. P. Bean and B. S. Metzner, 1985, *Review of Educational Research*, *55*(4), 485-540 (https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543055004485). Copyright 1985 by Sage Publications.

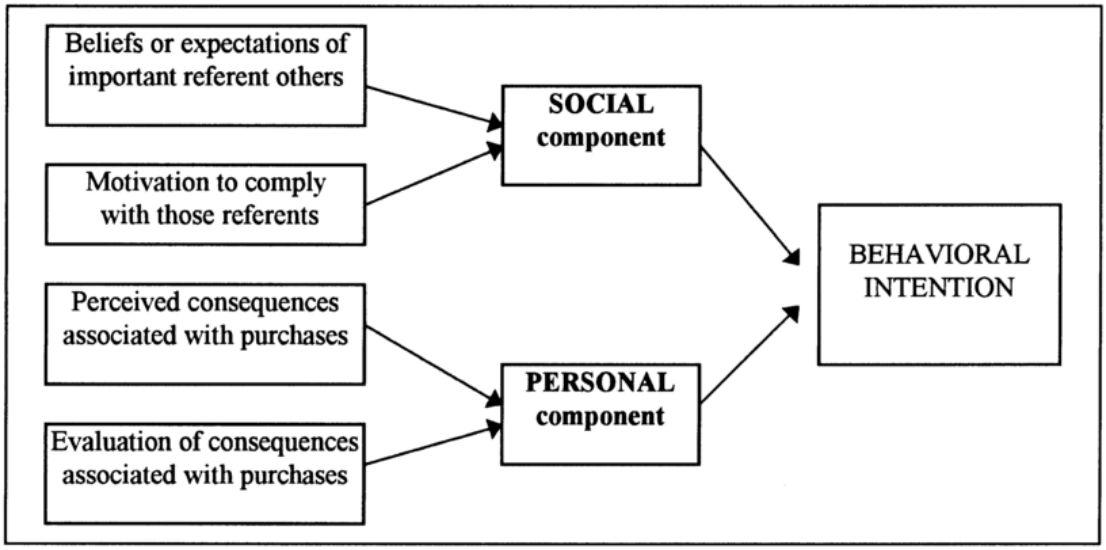
Bean's models of student attrition, in its most recent iteration, is appropriate for the current study. To begin with, it has been shown to be highly predictive for female students as opposed to male students (Bean, 1981). Since the target population for this study is African American women, this model is a good fit. Another reason why Bean's model is a good option to use for this study's theoretical framework is that it takes into consideration multiple variants, i.e., academic factors, social-psychological factors, environmental factors, and socialization factors (Bean, 1981; Bean & Metzner, 1985). The comprehensive approach is better suited for describing complex human behavior in complex psycho-social contexts. Causal sequence: Object (situation) -> perception (cognitive function) = judgment (value statement)

The Importance of Intention Model

Through Bean (1981) and Bean and Metzner (1985) there was a firm and consistent contention that a student's intention about completing a degree program was important to the student's vulnerability to attrition. This contention came from the work of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) and their Importance of Intention Model (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

The Importance of Intention Model (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975)



Note. **From *Belief, Attitude, Intent, and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research* (p. x), by M. Fishbein and I. Ajzen. 1975, Addison-Wesley. Copyright 1975 by Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.**

The Importance of Intention Model by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) predicts that two tiers of variables influence behavioral intentions. The first-tier groups the variables as either social components or personal components. Social components include socialized beliefs and expectations, as well as peer pressure to comply with the beliefs and expectations of reference groups. Conversely, personal components are intrinsic in nature and include how the person perceives the consequences of their decision and evaluates the consequences of their possible choices (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In simpler

terms, this model states that behavioral intentions are constructed by a person's reaction to social pressures to act in certain ways, and the individual's cost-benefit analysis of different options available.

This model is appropriate for the current study because it describes the rationale behind Bean's model and provides additional support and information about why the target study population is more prone to degree program attrition than many other demographic groups. Within the Bean model, the Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) model helps to provide the infrastructure for the relationship between: beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. Beliefs are constructed by the social components of the Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) model, the personal components of the model construct attitude, and intention is the outcome for both models.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

Attrition in Higher Education

Educational institutions and researchers have studied attrition for more than a century (Aulck et al., 2019). The reason is simple, attrition rates are used to evaluate the quality of education being delivered, the efficacy of the institution's support services, and the sustainability of their business models (George et al., 2021; Hollins, 2022; Jauhar et al., 2023). Subsequently, there are volumes of research on this topic, and many definitions of the term. However, for the purposes of this study, attrition is defined as the non-completion of a degree program (Aulck et al., 2019). Since this study is working with non-traditional students who are highly likely to have non-traditional timelines for the completion of their degrees, no time limit was placed on graduating.

Risk Factors for Nontraditional Student Attrition

The literature identified several risk factors for nontraditional student attrition. The first risk factor was financial constraints (Casanova & Pullido, 2022). In a case study of 31 graduate students who had attended Occidental Mindoro State College Graduate School, financial constraints were reported as the most noted reason for attrition from degree programs (Casanova & Pullido, 2022). Financial constraints included insufficient funds to pay for college, un- and under-employment, changes in work, and new or increased competing financial obligations (Casanova & Pullido, 2022). Kamer and Ishitani (2021) also reported that a student's financial constraints impacted their attrition risks, but they further showed the year of study the nontraditional student was impacted by what financial constraints had the greatest impact on attrition rates. For example, low-income students were more likely to drop out of their degree program in the first year of study, while middle-income students were more likely to drop out during the second year of study (Kamer & Ishitani, 2021). Low-income students struggled the most with the additional costs associated with the first year of college and the newness of budgeting for college costs and reduced availability to work and earn a wage, while middle-income students struggled more to manage the on-going demand for extra funds to pay for the continuation of their degree programs (Kamer & Ishitani, 2021). In both situations, nontraditional students were most disadvantaged by financial constraints. Ellis (2019) supported this finding, showing that nontraditional students tend to do excel at successfully completing courses, but struggle to finish a degree program.

Self-Efficacy in Field of Study

Another risk factor for attrition among nontraditional students is a lack of self-efficacy in their field of study. Cohen and Kelly (2019) predicted that community college students that had low math self-efficacy would be less likely to either pursue a four-year degree in STEM subjects or would have higher attrition rates. A nonexperimental correlation study of 1,511 community college students in STEM degree program showed that the prediction was supported by the findings (Cohen & Kelly, 2019). The study revealed that when a student enrolled in remedial math courses because of low self-efficacy in this subject matter, they were highly likely to change to a non-STEM degree program and/or would drop out before completing their community college experience (Cohen & Kelly, 2019). Stephen et al. (2020) supported this finding, showing that nontraditional student attrition rates from semester to semester were correlated with self-efficacy, self-directedness, and self-regulation. Weaver (2019) further explored this finding by exploring how professor-student relationships affect nontraditional student's self-efficacy, especially during their initial year in school. The findings from this study showed that the quality of the relationship between the professor and the student was a significant predictive factor for student self-efficacy (Weaver, 2019). This means that any factors that negatively affect this relationship, such as discrimination, can negatively impact a nontraditional student's self-efficacy and subsequently increase their chances of attrition.

Alignment of Support Resources With Student Needs

Research on attrition rates for community colleges presents dire results. The rate of attrition, especially among nontraditional students, is excessively high, putting the financial stability of these organizations at risk (Brown, 2020; Weiss et al., 2019). One of the most cited reasons for attrition among nontraditional community college students is a lack of alignment between support resources and student needs. This was cited in both Brown (2020) and Weiss et al. (2019).

Several reasons account for the lack of alignment between support resources and students' needs at community colleges. The main reason being that community colleges have less money to spend on support services, for the very reason these schools are attractive to low-income and/or non-traditional schools, they charge students lower fees for degree and certificate programs (Weiss et al., 2019). With less money driving revenues up, community colleges par down their support services to save money for what they perceive as critical services and expenses. Often the rationale is that the money not spent on support services can be spent on things that support student retention and graduation (Weiss et al., 2019). However, based on the findings offered by Bennett et al. (2021), show that the better investment is in student support services, as they have a statistically significant correlation with higher retention and graduation rates at community colleges.

Comparison of Demographic Groups for Attrition Rates

Many demographic characteristics correlate with attrition rate variances. According to Shapiro et al. (2019), students in two-year public college programs in 2012

had much lower completion rates (39.22%) compared to students in four-year public (65.66%) and four-year private or nonprofit programs (76.06%). The only demographic group that has a lower completion rate is students in four-year private for-profit degree programs (37.31%) (Shapiro et al., 2019). These findings were reinforced with the 2013 data collected by the National Center of Education Statistics (2023). The NCES data showed that students in two-year programs had much higher attrition rates than four-year program students. However, having full-time student status served as a protective factor for attrition, as full-time students were 37 to 45% more likely to graduate than part-time students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023).

When looking at attrition rates for students participating in two-year degree programs, race does appear to be a predictive factor for attrition (National Center for Center of Education Statistics, 2023). According to the National Center of Education Statistics (2023), Black students in these programs had the highest attrition rates among all races (87%). When compared to other races (Asian students 64%, Pacific Islander students 66%, white students 68%, Hispanic students 70%, American Indian students 73%, and mixed-race students 75%), this attrition rates indicate that these students are subjected to variables that are disproportionately impacting their academic success (National Center of Education Statistics, 2023). Even when compared to the average attrition rate of 70%, Black students still lag.

Just like in the overall attrition rates by school type, the attrition rates for Black students by school type show a similar pattern (National Center of Education Statistics, 2023). Black students have the highest attrition rates when attending public community

colleges (87%), and the lowest attrition rates when attending private – nonprofit community colleges (50%) (National Center of Education Statistics, 2023). This suggests that Black students are getting the best educations and support services when attending private-nonprofit colleges than public schools.

The Role of Beliefs in Student Attrition

One predictive factor that researchers associate with attrition is beliefs (Lazarides et al., 2020). Belief is something that a person perceives as being truthful (Lazarides et al., 2020). Beliefs influence the decisions made by a person because a belief directs a person's expectations (Delen et al., 2020). Based on Expectancy Theory, people act in accordance with what they believe will happen, for instance, they will engage in behaviors that they believe will produce a positive consequence, and they will avoid behaviors that they believe will have a negative consequence (Artiles & Matusovich, 2020). When applying to college attrition, students decide to drop out because either they do not think that staying in school will produce a positive outcome, or they think that there is more value in dropping out of the program (Artiles & Matusovich, 2020). For example, if a nontraditional African American female student experiences excessive amounts of discrimination, microaggressions, and lack of support for the completion of their program, their belief likely will be that they are better off not completing their degree.

Competence Beliefs

The literature on the relationship between beliefs and attrition showed that competence beliefs impacted attrition rates (McLean et al., 2019; Nemtcan et al., 2022).

This discussion began with McLean et al. (2019) who showed that students who felt competent in a subject matter were more engaged with the subject matter and more likely to complete degree programs related to that subject. Specifically, McLean et al. (2019) showed that students who had a positive experience in STEM and engineering learning activities were more likely to graduate from STEM and/or engineering degree programs than students that did not have the competence belief produced by an early positive learning experience. This finding reinforces the significant correlation between self-efficacy and success. Self-efficacy defines a person's belief that he/she is competent enough to complete an activity successfully (Nemtcan et al., 2022). Nemtcan et al. (2022) further showed that when self-efficacy was low, students tended to procrastinate, which ultimately led to reduced academic performance and the development of attritional intentions.

Nielsen et al. (2019) also studied the relationship between self-efficacy and student attrition, this time looking at how Freshman's incoming level of self-efficacy in the areas of learning and exam taking impacted their first-year attrition rates. The sample included 5,017 first year students from the University of Copenhagen and the University of Aarhus (Nielsen et al., 2019). The findings showed a strong positive correlation between self-efficacy in learning and subsequent attrition rates, and between self-efficacy in exam taking and subsequent attrition rates. Nielsen et al. (2019) concluded that student competency beliefs, referred to as self-efficacy, were significant predictors of student attrition outcomes.

Relative Performance Beliefs

Another type of belief correlated to student attrition was relative performance beliefs (Owens, 2022; Witherspoon et al., 2019). This type of belief describes how students perceive their chances of success based on their comparison to other groups of students. Owens (2022) investigated gender-based relative performance beliefs to explain differences in STEM degree program specialization rates by gender. Owens (2022) recruited 5,700 undergraduate students in various STEM introductory courses and evaluated students' perceptions of their relative performance. The findings showed that male students were overconfident in their competence in the STEM subject and female students were underconfident about their competence in the STEM subject (Owens, 2022). When actual performance data was presented to students in the study, the gap in relative performance perceptions was reduced. However, it was unclear if the reduction in the relative performance gap was caused by changed beliefs or from male students taking fewer STEM course credits (Owens, 2022). Additional research is needed to clarify this finding.

Witherspoon et al. (2019) also explored the concept of relative performance beliefs and their impact on female medical students. This study showed that high performing and highly competent female students have high attrition rates from pre-medicine and medical programs. The cause of this attrition are negative experiences in grade school, high school, and undergraduate studies related to the socialization these students have to believe they are destined to perform worse than male students. Witherspoon et al. (2019) called the outcome of this socialization gendered attrition, as it

decreased female students' motivation to complete their medical degree programs, despite showing interests in this career path in high school. When applied to the current study, these findings could be used to explain why nontraditional African American female students unusually high attrition rates have; they are socialized to believe they will fail which motivates attrition.

Attitudes

One of the variables in the theoretical construct for the current study is attitudes. It was selected because attitudes are a part of Bean's (1981) *Synthetic Causal Model of Student Attrition*, a foundational theory for the study's theoretical construct. Attitude refers to the readiness cognitive state of the individual to do something (Crameri et al., 2021). In other words, it impacts how ready a person feels to do something, such as completing a degree program. Bean (1981) argued that attitude plays a key role in predicting student attrition. A review of the literature on attitude and student attrition supports this point.

Disenchantment

Disenchantment negatively impacts female African American nontraditional student attitudes about completing their degree programs (Rosenzweig et al., 2021). Disenchantment means that the person's feelings and aspirations related to a task or thing have been damaged or altered because of changes in interest. Rosenzweig et al. (2021) showed that many students drop out of biomedical fields because their interests have changed. The change of interest can be caused by many things, including discipline-related traumas, poor instruction experiences, lack of representation in the field of a

demographic group that the student identifies with, and other negative experiences (Rosenweiz et al., 2021). For example, the COVID-19 pandemic led to hostile work and learning environments for those in biomedical fields, causing an exodus of professionals and students (Wang et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2021). Based on this information, female African American nontraditional students can be evaluated for interest stability to determine if this is a risk factor for attrition in this population and how to maintain student interest in their chosen degree program long enough to complete it.

Dissatisfaction

Another issue that impacts student attitudes related to completing their degree program is dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction means student expectations are not being met for one or more reasons, leaving them with a negative affective state (Zulu & Mutereko, 2020). Many reasons contribute to student dissatisfaction. Zulu and Mutereko (2020) revealed that poor instruction, limited course offerings, and low-quality learning experiences all contributed to student dissatisfaction and poor attitudes about continuing their education. Salame and Nazir (2019) also stated that insufficient support for marginalized students caused them to be dissatisfied with their education. Jones (2023) also presented that students who face discrimination, barriers to inclusion, and general feelings of alienation at an institution of higher education contribute to the degradation of their attitudes about continuing their education. Similarly, Hartzell et al. (2021) noted that feelings of alienation, being discriminated against, and being underserved all made students dissatisfied with their education and motivated them to drop out of their degree programs. These examples illustrate how environmental factors that impact student

satisfaction can systemically drive marginalized groups to drop out, making dissatisfaction another variable in which to assess among the proposed study's target population.

Intentions

Another aspect of the model of attrition introduced by Bean (1981) is intention. Intentions are what a person plans to do (Nemtcan et al., 2022). Intention drives behavior, so it is important to control if the objective is to reduce attrition rates (Kwakwa et al., 2024). The argument made by researchers like Bean (1981) and Nemtcan et al. (2022) is that if a student intends to drop out of school, then that is what he/she will do.

Self-Efficacy

Several factors contribute to students' intentions to complete their degree programs or drop out. Nemtcan et al. (2022) provided three. First, attritional intentions are impacted by self-efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy means that the person believes he/she can do something. Therefore, People with high self-efficacy are more likely to have an intention to do something than those with low self-efficacy (Nemtcan et al., 2022). As applied to female African American nontraditional students, if this group has low self-efficacy to complete their degrees, for whatever reason, then the prediction is that they will drop out of school. This suggests that self-efficacy interventions could help promote lower attrition rates among the proposed study's target population.

Sociocognitive Factors

Nemtcan et al. (2022) also presented that socio-cognitive factors impact attritional intentions. Socio-cognitive factors are the interactions between people that influence their

attitudes, beliefs, and intentions (Nemtcan et al., 2020). This concept provides the model for how female African American nontraditional students' intentions to complete their degree programs can be impacted by the social interactions and influencers in their life. For example, graduation is supported by social encouragement and the projection that graduating is essential and valued by the student's key affiliate groups (Body, 2020). In contrast, if the social input that the student gets negates the importance or value of graduating or reinforces self-doubts the student may have about completing her degree, then this can reduce her intentions to finish the degree program (Body, 2020; Nemtcan et al., 2020; Nemtcan et al., 2022). For these reasons, social interventions and support services may also benefit female African American nontraditional students and improve their graduation rates.

African American Women and Community College Attrition

The target population for the proposed study is female African American nontraditional students attending community colleges. This population has an exceptionally high attrition rate that researchers are attempting to understand (Aina et al., 2022; Green, 2023; Haynes et al., 2020; Jones, 2023). The reason(s) for this trend is not fully understood, although several themes on the subject matter exist in the current literature.

Current Themes

The first theme associated with possible reasons why female African American nontraditional students have an unusually high attrition rate is that this demographic group faces many unique stressors that impact their attitudes, beliefs, and intentions

(Haynie, 2019; Johnson, 2020; Kam et al., 2019; Lewis & Wu, 2021; Okpych & Courtney, 2021). One unique factor this group faces is intersectionality. Intersectionality is a complex form of discrimination in which a subgroup is discriminated against differently because the people in the group have intersections of multiple factors of marginalization, i.e., sex, race, color, religion, socioeconomic status, and disability (Haynes et al., 2020). The effects of intersectionality on the quality of the female African American nontraditional student's education are significant. It can impact how the student is treated if she is included in discussions and learning opportunities if she has visible representation in the staff, faculty, and administration, and how fairly she is treated by peers, professors, and administrators (Haynes et al., 2020). Intersectionality-directed behaviors can make female African American nontraditional students feel alienated, threatened, and abused at school, all of which can contribute to a poor attitude about going to school and increase motivation to drop out of the degree program (Hartzell et al., 2021; Haynes et al., 2020).

Female African American nontraditional students also face the stressors that other women and African Americans face. These include different occurrence rates of community violence, poverty, experiences in foster care, mental health issues, self-concept and identify crises, and low self-efficacy (Haynie, 2019; Johnson, 2020; Kam et al., 2019; Lewis & Wu, 2021; Okpych & Courtney, 2021). While most female African American nontraditional students are not subjected to all these factors, they are faced with at least one or two of these risk factors. These are highly impactful issues that take a toll on student mental and physical well-being, leading to lowered self-efficacy,

decreased interest in completing their degree programs, and increased intentions to drop out (Cohen & Kelly, 2019; Crameri et al., 2021; Festa & Knotts, 2021; Hartzell et al., 2021; Haynes et al., 2020; Norvilitis & Linn, 2021; McLean et al., 2019).

Points of Agreement

There is a growing body of evidence related to the factors that impact the attrition rates of female African American nontraditional students. One point of agreement is that the high attrition rates among members of this demographic group are not univariate, meaning that there is no one universal reason causing this trend. Instead, the trend is influenced by a complex and dynamic system of variables that impact how likely a female African American nontraditional student attending a community college is to complete her degree program. A multivariate model, therefore, is agreed to be the better approach to describing this situation (Cohen & Kelly, 2019; Crameri et al., 2021; Festa & Knotts, 2021; Hartzell et al., 2021; Haynes et al., 2020; Norvilitis & Linn, 2021; McLean et al., 2019).

Another point of agreement among researchers is that graduation rates among female African American nontraditional students are enhanced when the student participates in a mentorship program. Apriceno et al. (2020) wrote that mentorships effectively protect this group and their success in higher education. This point was supported by Cartwright et al. (2021), Dickens (2021), and Remaker et al. (2021). These researchers also reported the importance of implementing mentorship programs early in Black women's higher education careers and the extra benefits associated with ongoing mentoring through their academic careers. These studies showed that mentorship

supports higher graduation rates at the undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate levels for Black women and that it further supports their professional success (Apriceno et al., 2020; Cartwright et al., 2021; Dickens, 2021; Remaker et al., 2021). These findings support the use of mentorship programs to support female African American nontraditional students' degree program success.

Another point of agreement among researchers is that resource availability is essential to graduation success among female African American nontraditional college students. This point was made by Bennett et al. (2021), Brown (2020), and Weiss et al. (2019). These studies looked at nontraditional students, minority students, female students, and students with a combination of these traits. Universally, students with access to more resources had graduation rates, while students who had resource deficits had much higher attrition rates (Bennett et al., 2021; Brown, 2020; Weiss et al., 2019). When applied to the proposed study, it suggests that offering female African American nontraditional students with more resources, such as financial aid, occupational training and placement, and mentorship programs, would help support improved graduation rates.

Points of Disagreement

While the limited research on attrition among various related groups of students, including nontraditional, African American, African American women, and female students, had key points of agreement, there was at least one point of disagreement. That point was the role that nontraditional student status had on attrition rates. Some research provided evidence supporting the hypothesis that nontraditional students universally have low graduation rates (Carreira & Lopes, 2021; Chen et al., 2020; Modenos, 2020).

Findings showed a high attrition rate among nontraditional students regardless of program, race, sex, or socioeconomic status. In contrast, Kamer and Ishitani (2021) showed that if there is a family history of nontraditional student status, there is a lower risk of attrition than if the student is a first-generation nontraditional student. This follows the socio-cognitive theory model, which predicts behavior based on what social models and encouragement the person has (Nemtcan et al., 2020). When applied to female African American nontraditional students, the proposed study should look at whether the participants have a family history of being nontraditional students and if not, inquire if participants would be interested in accessing a support group made up of female African American nontraditional students and graduates.

Gaps to Be Addressed

A considerable amount of research was available on attrition among different groups of college students. Research was also available on attrition rates, predictive factors, and risk factors among nontraditional and marginalized student groups. However, the existing gap relates to attrition among female African American nontraditional students. Little information was available on this specific demographic group and situation. Also, the research was available did not include female African American nontraditional student opinions and first-hand experiences. Instead, the information available was provided by third parties, like school administrators, government agencies, and educational organizations. With female African American nontraditional students being a fast-growing population, there is a high degree of need to learn more about them,

what causes attrition among them, and what support services they want and need to support their success (United States Census Bureau, 2023).

Summary and Conclusions

In this study, I sought to understand the challenges and needs of female African American nontraditional students related to graduating from community college programs. Chapter Two provided a review of the literature. It started by establishing a theoretical foundation for the proposed study, highlighting Bean's (1981) *Synthetic Causal Model of Student Attrition* and Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) *Importance of Intention Model*. Combined, these theoretical models highlight the importance of attitudes and intention in predicting or preventing college attrition. The literature reviewed showed several points of agreement that are important to the proposed study, including the agreement among researchers that college attrition among female African American nontraditional students is a multivariate problem, that resource availability is essential to supporting improved graduation rates, and that mentorship programs are critical for this demographic group's success in school and in the professional world. In the next chapter, the proposed study's methodology is presented.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The specific research problem that will be addressed through this study is that there was a lack of first-hand knowledge available about what female African American nontraditional students need, in terms of support services and resources, to enhance their abilities to graduate from two-year junior college degree programs. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe experiences with support services and to suggest changes to improve support for higher graduation rates among female African American nontraditional students participating in two-year junior college degree programs. The structure of the research conducted addressing the research problem and fulfilling the purpose of this study was a phenomenological study design. This chapter provides a detailed description of the study's methodology, including research questions posed, the methodology selected, participants, data, data analysis, and comments on the limitations of the study.

Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative methodology was selected to describe the experiences that female nontraditional African American students have in a junior college program. Specifically, the study sought to understand what support they are offered by two-year junior college degree programs and where gaps existed between what these students perceived to need to support their degree program completion and what was offered by the institutions of higher education. Qualitative research was the appropriate approach because it answered questions like how and why, which were essential for creating an accurate and comprehensive picture of the population being targeted (Rezigalla, 2020). A quantitative

methodology could explain what was happening with the proposed study's target population, female nontraditional African American students participating in a junior college two-year degree program, such as what the attrition rate for these students were or what the utilization rate was for the support services offered by junior colleges, and it could have provided valuable information. However, these numbers would not have explained why female nontraditional African American students had higher than average attrition rates or why certain support services were used and others were not (Rezigall, 2020). While valuable, the statistics associated with the target population's performance in and graduation rates from two-year degree programs at junior colleges were already known. This study wanted to fill the knowledge gap about why these things happen so that appropriate interventions and policy changes can be implemented. Subsequently, a quantitative study design was rejected in favor of a qualitative methodology.

The qualitative study design selected to explore the experiences of female nontraditional African American students attending two-year junior college degree programs is phenomenology. Phenomenology seeks to find the essence of a phenomenon, which it does by studying the phenomenon via direct observations and interactions with people who are experiencing the phenomenon in real time (Van Manen, 2016). There are several types of phenomenology that can be used, but the type selected for the proposed study is the phenomenology of sociality. This methodology derivative pursues an understanding how social interactions and dynamics impact perceptions of the targeted phenomenon (Hegel et al., 1977). Hegel et al. (1977) described the phenomenology of sociality as being an extension of the phenomenology of the spirit. When ascribed to the

spirit, phenomenological researchers seek to describe how a person creates meaning for a phenomenon via self-consciousness. In the phenomenology of sociality, the research subject's self-consciousness is explored to see how they relate to the substance of their life, which is their experiences in a socially constructed environment (Hegel et al., 1977). When applied to female nontraditional African American students, the proposed phenomenological study will explore and describe how they perceive their treatment and status in the higher education system and community and how this perception impacts the services, support, and participation level they experience.

The phenomenological approach to researching female nontraditional African American students was the Provocative Method of Epiphany. This approach was described by Van Manen (2016) and involved understanding the context of the phenomenon and the uniqueness of the research subject's experience, and then invoking lived throughness is a concept that means the person has a vivid awareness of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 2016). This is considered a revocative experience, or a process where the researcher brings to the subject's awareness the phenomenon from a memory. After this is achieved, the next step is to evoke nearness. Nearness, as it applies to phenomenology, means that the vivid awareness of the phenomenon is perceived as a current experience, happening right now, as opposed to the revocative awareness which means the phenomenon is viewed in the past tense (Van Manen, 2016). Nearness allows the research subjects to utilize all of their senses to describe their experience. This also tends to elicit more details than what can be abstracted from normal interviewing techniques. Intensification is then used to "give key-words their invocative value, so that

layers of phenomenological meaning become strongly embedded in the text" (Van Manen, 2016, p. 289). Pathic is the next step in this process, which is when the tone of the experience and keywords is assigned via the reflections of the research subjects. The final step is epiphany, which is when the findings from the provocative analysis transforms the understanding of the researcher and other readers, allowing them to more clearly and profoundly understand the phenomenon from the subjective perspective of the research subjects.

Research Questions

I investigated the phenomenon of female African American nontraditional students attending two-year junior college degree programs with the intent of answering the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs, particularly regarding the support services offered to them by their schools?

RQ2: What support services and resources do female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs describe as value-adding and necessary to reduce their attrition rates?

Role of the Researcher

The researcher played several roles throughout the research process. During the design and development of the research project, the researcher played the role of expert investigator (Neubauer et al., 2019). This role required researchers to apply their knowledge, skills, and abilities to design the project, data collection instruments, and

protocols for the study (Van Manen, 2023). It also required the researcher to consult with other subject-matter-experts and the Internal Board of Review to ensure that the study was structured appropriately, that its components were aligned, and that it met all ethical, academic, and professional standards applicable to the type of inquiry being conducted (Neubauer et al., 2019; Van Manen, 2023). In this role, the researcher demonstrated his/her professionalism and academic authority.

During the data collection process, the role of the researcher was that of the direct observer (Neubauer et al., 2019). It was important that data collected on the lived experiences of the participants be recorded objectively and without interpretation by the researcher (DeHart, 2020; Neubauer et al., 2019). The researcher engaged with the participants as they experience the phenomenon under review. The researcher did not try to influence or direct the answers of the participant but instead followed the lead of the participant and document their experience in the context of their experience (DeHart, 2020). While it was important for the researcher to remain objective, there was also a need for the researcher to be reflective about the phenomenon and the experiences of the participants (Neubauer et al., 2019). Reflections compared personal experiences to that of the participant and then discussed and explain similarities and differences (Patton, 2020). The processes of comparison and contrasting identified potential units of meaning and identify key issues that were impacting the lived experiences of the participants in a pluralistic cultural setting (DeHart, 2020; Neubauer et al., 2019; Patton, 2020). The roles of direct observer and reflector were critical to collecting data that were analyzed to produce a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of inquiry.

During the data analysis process, the role of the researcher became more reflexive (Dörfler & Stierand, 2021; Neubauer et al., 2019). Reflexive means that researchers thought about the data collected from different points of view and through different lenses. This helped researchers to understand the meaning construct units of the data and contribute to the construction of a new model of the phenomenon that not only describes the what, but also the why and the how of the phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019). The researcher also used bracketing to help make the reflexivity process more objective and participant-focused (Dörfler & Stierand, 2021). Bracketing, which was already explained, was when the researcher implemented strategies to remain aware of his/her biases, so that they do not impact or degrade data collection or analysis (Dörfler & Stierand, 2021). The role of the reflexive analyst contributed to the strength of the study's outcomes by encouraging deeper and more meaningful engagement with the data collected and the conclusions drawn.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The participants for the study were female nontraditional African American students attending two-year junior college degree programs. Since the study population focused on nontraditional students, the student were 25 years of age or older. The race of the sample included participants who identify as African American. These participants had diverse socioeconomic statuses but did not include participants from affluent socioeconomic classes, as affluent students tend to utilize more expensive training and higher education resources, such as four-year universities and private training centers.

A sample of eight female nontraditional African American students were sampled from one or more two-year junior college degree programs in the researcher's community. The researcher worked with the schools to promote the study and recruit participants. Information sessions were held on campus to explain the study, answer questions, and complete initial paperwork and informed consent.

Inclusion criteria were as follows: age of at least 25, female or identify as female, self-perceived as a nontraditional student, and participating in two-year junior college degree programs. Exclusion criteria were: did not meet the inclusion criteria, were not available during the entirety of the study, had mental or physical health concerns that would make participating in the study potentially harmful to the individual, or they could not communicate effectively verbally or in writing.

Procedures for Sampling

The sample strategy used was non-probabilistic. The snowball sampling approach was used. Recruitment was done using the social media site, LinkedIn. The contact information of LinkedIn members was in the public domain, making it an ethical and accessible sampling frame. Emails were sent to members who met the qualification criteria for the study. In the emails, I explained the study and asked for volunteers. Recruitment also was done at a local junior college, utilizing the school's resource center and student message boards. Those who qualified for the study were asked to refer other female nontraditional African American students that may be interested in participating. The referrals helped to expand the sample's diversity and provided me with access to

samples that may qualify for the study but attended a different junior college than the one where recruitment took place.

Instrumentation

Phenomenologists avoid using traditional instruments to collect data. Instead, it uses subject narratives to create texts to analyze (Van Manen, 2016). Subsequently, the only instrumentation used was an interview sheet with questions the researcher used to guide the participant interview process. The semi-structured interview protocol with interview questions is located in Appendix A. This instrument was used during in-person interviews or online interviews, depending on the preference and safety measures needed at the time the interviews are conducted. Interviews were recorded using the record feature on Teams. A data analysis instrument was also used to organize, store, and analyze the data collected.

Data Analysis Plan

Subject narratives were collected via semi-structured interviews, participant storytelling (narration), and subject journaling. All interviews and interactions with the participants were recorded via a teleconferencing program. The recordings were transcribed manually and verified for accuracy by asking the participants to read through the transcript and to make any corrections that they fell are needed to convey the message they intended. The corrected transcripts were then mined for data using the phenomenological provocative method of epiphany. The data was qualitative in nature and abstracted from the narrative texts.

The data analysis process followed the protocols outlined in Smith et al. (2009). This protocol described phenomenological analysis as being iterative. Iterative means that it requires many cycles of reviewing the data, drawing out important keywords, and evaluating the data for theme, categories, and meaning. The following was the Smith et al. (2009) protocol that was used for analyzing the data from this study:

1. Transcribe narrative data into documents. Verify the content with the research subjects.
2. Conduct a "close, line-by-line analysis of the experiential claims, concerns, and understandings of each participant" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79).
3. Identify "emergent patterns (i.e. themes) within this experiential material, emphasizing both convergence and divergence, commonality and nuance" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79).
4. Develop "a structure, frame or gestalt which illustrates the relationships between themes" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79).
5. Organize "all of this material in a format which allows for analyzed data to be traced right through the process, from initial comments on the transcript, through initial clustering and thematic development, into the final structure of themes" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80).
6. Review the data analysis using "supervision, collaboration, or audit to help test and develop the coherence and plausibility of interpretation" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80).

7. Create “a full narrative, evidenced by a detailed commentary on data extracts, which takes the reader through the interpretation, usually theme-by-theme, and is often supported by some form of visual guide” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80).
8. Reflect “on one’s own perceptions, conceptions and processes” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed with the practice of theoretical triangulation. This involved comparing and contrasting new findings to findings reported by other researchers (Santos et al., 2020). Similarities and differences were noted and discussed as to what they suggested about the trustworthiness of the data and conclusions drawn by the current researcher.

Trustworthiness was also addressed by verifying all information received from participants via member checking. Member checking involved asking the research participant to verify the accuracy of the data collected (Stahl & King, 2020). For the proposed study, this included having participants review a transcript of the interviews and provide feedback. They were then asked to provide feedback as to what they wanted changed in their narrative. Member checking ensured that the data used by the researcher was an accurate representation of what the participant intended to communicate.

Personal bias was a major ethical concern for the study. It was hard to eliminate all personal biases, especially when the researcher and the participants have grown up and were assimilated into a dominant culture where race, sex, and socioeconomic status

significantly impact social status, access to resources, and treatment. To minimize the problem of researcher bias, I practiced mindfulness to ensure I was aware of my personal biases, opinions about the study population and sample, and reactions to participants, so I could alter my behavior and thought patterns to keep them as objective and neutral as possible. I also implemented bracketing strategies during the interviewing and data analysis. Bracketing was when the researcher implemented strategies to remain aware of her biases, so that they did not impact or degrade data collection or analysis (Dörfler & Stierand, 2021). I used bracketing by adding a statement to the top of my interviewing and data analysis protocols to keep myself aware of things that could bias my response to the participants and their data. For example, I needed to remind myself that I am a nontraditional female student, so I came to this research project with preexisting ideas about what this identity was and how it impacted student experiences and performance. During data analysis, I posted a similar bracketing statement at the top of my data collection instruments, to remind myself to neutralize my opinions before completing the phenomenological analysis of my research.

Ethical Procedures

The first ethical concern associated with conducting a phenomenological study was protecting participant confidentiality and anonymity (Mavhandu-Mudzusi et al., 2022). These privacy concerns derived from how data was collected: direct interactions and observations of the participant. Privacy concerns were further escalated by the technologies used to record observations: online teleconferencing platforms (Mavhandu-Mudzusi et al., 2022). Privacy breaches can occur during data collection, storage, and

analysis when unauthorized individuals access the data via unscrupulous methodologies, such as hacking, or by accident, such as walking by a computer monitor while the recording is being played. To protect participant privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity, it was essential not to include any identifying information on the data files. For example, instead of having the participant's name on the data file or in the data file, a random code was assigned to it to help keep participant responses connected, and all identifying information was redacted (Mavhandu-Mudzusi et al., 2022). Mitigating these concerns involved removing all identifying information from recordings and data files, using random codes for participants, storing videos in encrypted and password-protected data storage media, and keeping the data storage media in a locked cabinet.

Informed consent was also a concern that was addressed. The proposed study provided each potential participant with an informed consent form. This form explained the study, provided the roles and responsibilities for the participant and the researcher, and explained all risks and rights associated with participating in the study. Informed consent is a necessary step in any research conducted on human subjects, and was a critical step in validating the ethicality of this study's design (Johnson & Smale, 2021).

Another potential privacy concern came from using peer reviews to evaluate the analysis for potential biasing. Phenomenology recommended using peer reviewers throughout the research process to help identify and make the researcher aware of potential subjectivity and bias of their processes and conclusions (Thomas, 2021). This has the potential to breach participant expectations for privacy. Subsequently, participants were informed that peer reviewers were used in the study, that reviewed the raw data,

data analyses, and report, but that steps were taken to ensure the peer reviewers will not be able to associate any data points with a specific person, as the participant identities were not shared with the peer reviewers.

In addition to participant privacy, participant safety was another ethical concern that needed mitigation. Participant safety was impacted by many factors of the phenomenological study, including exposure to distressing topics and situations that may embarrass the participant if their responses are disclosed with identifying information (Thomas, 2021). The interview and observation setting also could have put the participants at risk of harm (Frachette et al., 2020). For the proposed study, participants faced only minimal levels of safety risks. However, the discussion of racism and intersectionality experiences with the participants may have caused them distress (Frachette et al., 2020; Thomas, 2021). To mitigate this risk, routine time outs were offered after the disclosure of sensitive information or narratives of difficult discrimination experiences, counseling support resources were made available to participants if they needed it, the participant were offered the right to stop the interview at any time for a break, the participant could have ended the interview at any time, and the participant were able to withdraw from the study at any time and also ask for their data to be removed from the study's data frame. These solutions empowered participants to control their comfort level and make them feel more secure. If there were safety concerns related to an in-person interview, such as a resurgence of COVID, online videoconferencing options will be offered (Mavhandu-Mudzusi et al., 2022). These steps helped to mediate any safety concerns.

Summary

The research problem addressed was that there was a lack of first-hand knowledge available about what female nontraditional African American students need in terms of support services and resources to enhance their abilities to graduate from two-year junior college degree programs. The purpose of the study was to describe experiences with support services and to suggest changes to improve support for higher graduation rates among the target population. The research questions posed for the study were (a) What are the lived experiences of female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs, particularly regarding the support services offered to them by their schools? and (b) What support services and resources do female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs describe as value-adding and necessary to reduce their attrition rates? The methodology selected was a qualitative methodology, and the approach taken will be the phenomenology of sociality. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. The participants were female non-traditional African American students enrolled in two-year degree programs offered by junior colleges found in the researcher's community. The sample size was eight participants. Non-probabilistic sampling methodologies was used, i.e., purposive and snowball sampling. The data was narratives collected via interviews. Data analysis followed the phenomenological mode: transcription, content analysis, memoing, coding, theming, and reflection.

Chapter 4: Results

There is a high rate of attrition among female African American nontraditional students, particularly in two-year junior college degree programs (Green, 2023; Jones, 2023). The specific research problem addressed by this study was the lack of firsthand knowledge about what support services and resources female African American nontraditional students need to enhance their ability to graduate from two-year junior college degree programs. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe experiences with support services and to suggest changes to improve support for higher graduation rates among female African American nontraditional students participating in two-year degree programs offered by junior colleges. A qualitative, phenomenological study was conducted. The research questions driving the study were: What are the lived experiences of female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs, particularly regarding the support services offered to them by their schools, and what support services and resources do female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs describe as value-adding and necessary to reduce their attrition rates? This chapter presents the results of the study, including the setting, participant demographics, data collection practices, data analysis strategies, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and a summary of the chapter.

Setting

At the time data were collected, the United States was facing significant sociopolitical and economic turmoil. The threat of budget cuts, the potential elimination of the Department of Education, tariffs, proposed cuts to Medicaid and other social

services programs, and significant natural disasters all impacted the perceived economic, physical, and emotional security of participants. These threats could have affected the participants' ability to focus on the phenomenon of support services offered by junior colleges, and they could have also made the participants more critical of the deficits and negative attributes of these services. However, the researcher did not notice any significant distress among the participants interviewed, as they all seemed to be able to compartmentalize their experiences effectively, providing accurate accounts of their schools' support services.

Demographics

The participants for the study were female nontraditional African American students attending two-year junior college degree programs. Eight participants were sampled. Since the study population focused on nontraditional students, the students' ages were 25 years or older. The sample included participants who identified as African American. These participants had diverse socioeconomic statuses but did not include participants from affluent socioeconomic classes, as affluent students tend to utilize more expensive training and higher education resources, such as four-year universities and private training centers.

Data Collection

I sampled eight female nontraditional African American students from various two-year junior college degree programs in the researcher's community. Inclusion criteria included: African American, age of at least 25, female or identify as female, self-perceived as a nontraditional student, and participating in two-year junior college degree

programs. Exclusion criteria were not available during the entirety of the study, had mental or physical health concerns that would make participating in the study potentially harmful to the individual, or could not communicate effectively verbally or in writing. The recruitment process followed the protocol set out in Chapter 3. It took longer than anticipated to recruit eight participants, but after three rounds of recruitment, all eight were identified, screened, and completed informed consent. The study experienced no attrition.

I conducted interviews using Teams, a digital teleconferencing platform. The researcher only recorded the audio tracks from the interviews using the platform's embedded tools. Video was disabled to help protect the identities of the participants. Each interview lasted about 30 min. Participants only completed one interview each. Transcripts were created for each audio track using Team's transcription tool. The transcripts were saved as Word documents and assigned codes (AH001, AH002, etc.) to protect the identities of the participants. Subject narratives were collected via semi-structured interviews, participant storytelling (narration), and subject journaling.

I manually transcribed the recordings and verified their accuracy by asking participants to review the transcript and make any necessary corrections to convey the intended message. The corrected transcripts were then mined for data using the phenomenological provocative method of epiphany. The data were qualitative and abstracted from the narrative texts, following the data collection protocol found in Chapter Three. The only deviation from the Chapter 3 data collection plan was the need to take additional steps to protect participants' identities when using Teams. For example,

since participants had to log in to Teams to use the platform, their screen names were visible during the interview and were also printed in the transcripts. The researcher redacted the screen names manually to eliminate identifying information and protect the participants' identities. No other unusual events occurred during the data collection process.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed the protocols outlined in Smith et al. (2009) and what was presented in Chapter 3. This protocol described phenomenological analysis as being iterative. This meant that it required many cycles of reviewing the data, drawing out important keywords, and evaluating the data for theme, categories, and meaning.

Protocol

I followed the Smith et al. (2009) protocol for analyzing the data from this study In Step 1, I used the transcription tool offered by Teams. I saved the transcript as a Word document and redacted the participant's screenname. I then assigned the transcript a code: AH001, AH002…AH008, to protect the privacy and anonymity of participants. I gave a copy of the transcript Word document to the participant to verify that it reflected what she wanted to communicate, and gave participants the opportunity to clarify, change, or add information to their file.

In Step 2, I conducted a "close, line-by-line analysis of the experiential claims, concerns, and understandings of each participant" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79). I started by reading through the transcript without making any notes, just to familiarize myself with the content. On the second read through, I highlighted keywords and phrases that

answered my questions. On the third reading, I searched for patterns in the participant's responses to identify codes. The codes were condensed to common ideas and words, and each code's frequency was counted. Table B1 in Appendix B includes the codes.

Step 3 involved identifying "emergent patterns (i.e. themes) within this experiential material, emphasizing both convergence and divergence, commonality and nuance" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79). Emergent patterns were identified by seeing what codes appeared across participant narratives. Codes were condensed into themes. Any deviations were noted, such as when the main theme was that schools were providing adequate support services, but a few participants noted that there were deficits in social and networking services and opportunities. This helped to establish variations in themes and experiences of the phenomenon. In Step 4, I developed "a structure, frame or gestalt which illustrates the relationships between themes" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79). Table B2 in Appendix B shows the themes and subthemes and provides a description of each subtheme.

In Step 5, I organized "all of this material in a format which allows for analyzed data to be traced right through the process, from initial comments on the transcript, through initial clustering and thematic development, into the final structure of themes" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80). I saved all my working files and progressive tables in an Excel notebook, so that the data analysis process can be traced from initial comments on the transcript, through the "initial clustering and thematic development, and into the final structure of themes" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80). Step 6 entailed using "supervision, collaboration, or audit to help test and develop the coherence and plausibility of

interpretation" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80). I worked with my dissertation team to review my data analysis process, conclusions drawn, and reporting.

Step 7 involved the creation of "a full narrative, evidenced by a detailed commentary on data extracts, which takes the reader through the interpretation, usually theme-by-theme, and is often supported by some form of visual guide" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80). I created and presented this full narrative in Chapters 4 and 5. Tables are included in Appendix B to help visualize the narrative's main points. Last, in Step 8, I reflected on my "perceptions, conceptions and processes" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80). This reflection was done iteratively through the revision and editing phases of the report writing process.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I addressed trustworthiness through the practice of theoretical triangulation. This involved comparing and contrasting new findings to findings reported by other researchers (Santos et al., 2020). I noted and discussed similarities and differences between my conclusions and those found in the literature. I also addressed trustworthiness by verifying all information received from participants via member checking. Member checking involved asking the research participant to verify the accuracy of the data collected (Stahl & King, 2020). For this study, participants reviewed a transcript of the interviews and provided feedback. I then asked them to provide feedback as to what they wanted changed in their narrative. This ensured that the data I analyzed accurately represented what the participant intended to communicate.

Personal bias was a primary ethical concern for the study. It was hard to eliminate all personal biases, especially when the researcher and the participants have grown up and assimilated into a dominant culture where race, sex, and socioeconomic status significantly impact social status, access to resources, and treatment. To minimize the problem of researcher bias, the researcher practiced mindfulness to ensure she was aware of her personal biases, opinions about the study population and sample, and reactions to participants. This enabled me to alter my behavior and thought patterns to keep them as objective and neutral as possible.

I also implemented bracketing strategies during the interviews and data analysis. Bracketing occurred when the researcher implemented strategies to remain aware of her biases, so that they did not impact or degrade data collection or analysis (Dörfler & Stierand, 2021). The researcher employed bracketing by adding a statement to the top of her interview and data analysis protocols to remain aware of potential biases that could influence her responses to the participants and their data. For example, she needed to remind herself that she is a nontraditional female student, so she approached this research project with preexisting ideas about what this identity meant and how it impacted student experiences and performance. During data analysis, she posted a similar bracketing statement at the top of her data collection instruments to remind herself to neutralize her opinions before completing the phenomenological analysis of her research.

Results

The eight participants were all African American women who were nontraditional students in two-year degree programs at junior colleges in the United States. The

researcher asked them questions about the support they received from their schools, and their opinions about whether their schools adequately met their needs, and if not, what their schools could do differently to support their abilities to graduate from their two-year degree programs. Table B1 in Appendix B summarizes the codes abstracted from the interviews. A total of 81 codes emerged, and each was counted according to its frequency. These codes were condensed into themes, revealing trends in the content found in the completed interviews. Table B2 in Appendix B summarizes the major themes and their associated subthemes observed across the eight completed interviews.

Research Question 1

The first RQ was, How do female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs describe the support services offered to them by their schools? Several themes aligned with this question (see Table B3 in Appendix B). The first theme was good access to support services that meet the school's needs. Five subthemes supported this theme. The first was financial aid, which included services that helped students pay for their education. The second was academic support, which was support services that help students perform well in their classes and to progress through their degree programs. The third subtheme was mental health services, which were services that supported student wellness and mental health. The fourth subtheme, multiple communication channels, describes the different channels and genres through which the school communicated with students. The fifth subtheme was access to technological resources, which were services that provided students access to the technology needed to engage with their learning materials and complete their coursework.

In general, participants felt that their schools did a good job connecting them with all available financial aid, including grants, scholarships, loans, and work-study opportunities. This ensured that students were able to pay for their program, learning materials, supplies, and necessary technology. Participants also noted that academic support met their needs, but that most of that support came directly from their professors.

> AH002: "I think the teachers are very, very motivating. They make sure everyone is on track if they see anyone like slacking on their work or. Not doing their assignments, it pretty much addresses the whole class and just tell us all to stay focus."
>
> AH005: "Our teachers were also, you know, pull us aside and have extra help for us as well."
>
> AH005: "Like if I was out a period of time, my teacher would text me directly in regards if everything was OK."

Additionally, participants revealed that financial aid support was readily available. For example, AH004 shared that financial aid was readily available, and counselors were on staff to help students find "pathways to where [they could] have other financial resources if [they] really need[ed] it, and they would pay for the class." Academic support was also available in the form of tutors, academic advisors, and professors. Academic support not only helped the students perform well in their classes but also protected the school brand as a quality educator.

Next, participants explained that their schools provided good access to mental health services, like counseling and support groups. They felt well-informed about these resources, and they were readily available to students.

> AH008: "Like a friend of mine, she actually was going through a divorce and her grades was down low. And what helped her was counseling mental counseling from the school. And that helped her, her academics to be successful."
>
> AH004: "The Mental Health Center Counseling services where they ask us students to say, like, if I'm going through anything, I can talk to someone and just kind of help, you know, talk me through it."

These services ensured students were psychologically fit enough to participate in their programs, and motivated to complete the degree programs, improving the graduation rate for the school.

Participants also explained that their schools did a good job providing them with access to technological resources, like computers and printers. For example, AH006 said that her school "offered computers." Similarly, AH007 explained, "Some support services that I know of are tutoring access to a computer lab with printers so that we can also print some of that information." By offering students access to school-owned or sponsored technology, students were better able to engage with learning materials and complete coursework, thereby supporting student success.

Finally, participants stated that their schools communicated using multiple channels to keep them informed about support services. The main ways that participants stated their schools communicated with them about available support services were

through email, flyers, social media, brochures, the school website and bulletin boards. Generally, however, most students stated that email was the only way they got information about services, and that in some cases, they got information through other people, such as other students and therapists on campus.

AH002: "My school says that emails on our student accounts and they tell us often what services they have available."

AH004: "They actually communicate them through social media, posting flyers all around campus, and also emailing students."

AH008: "They could send an email because as a student it was necessary almost mandatory that you check your school e-mail."

All the services described by the participants meet the school's needs by supporting their students' abilities to pay for and complete coursework. However, they do not necessarily support student graduation. While students benefit from these services, and they do facilitate academic progress, they do not meet all of the students' needs, nor do they directly address what participants state are most important to their ability to graduate.

The second theme associated with RQ1 is moderate to poor access to support services that address students' needs. Six subthemes supported this theme. The first subtheme, inadequate networking opportunities, describes support services related to connecting students to internal and external resources, people, and organizations that can help support their academic and professional success. The second subtheme was missing mentoring, which describes a lack of access to mentors and mentoring. The third

subtheme was missing childcare support services, which relates to a lack of subsidies and on-site childcare for students. The fourth subtheme was inadequate socialization opportunities for students living off-campu*s*, which would include clubs, activities, and social events that nontraditional students could attend to connect with their learning community. The fifth subtheme, need more of the support services offere*d*, describes a general trend where participants felt the support service supply did not meet demand. The sixth subtheme was missing career planning and placement services, which refer to services related to degree completion, transferring credits to 4-year degree programs, and identifying the degrees and courses necessary for specific careers.

Most of the deficits discussed by the participants related to socialization opportunities. The participants felt that their nontraditional status and the fact that they lived off-campus limited their ability to become a part of the learning community. As a result, they felt like outsiders and felt disadvantaged because they did not have the same college experience as their traditional student counterparts.

AH002: “Socially I feel like I didn't really need a lot of support.”

AH001: “But I just feel like they may have benefited from having more day activities cause a lot of clubs and stuff.”

This establishes that school support services are not completely meeting participant needs. One of the most frequently mentioned deficits by participants was the lack of adequate networking opportunities. For example, AH001 said, “I don’t think they supported my networking abilities that much, I mean, like I said, I just went to class and went on home.” Participants said that networking opportunities may have existed on

campus, but since they lived off campus and had families and full-time jobs, they did not have the time or ability to utilize networking opportunities.

Participants also stated that they did not have access to networking opportunities, mentoring, career planning, and career placement. These activities are critical for students to understand what steps to take next, how to connect with the right people to access interviews and work opportunities, and to take the right steps to make progress in their professional development and success.

> AH007: “Yeah, with the networking, it's kind of difficult to fully participate in those opportunities because like I said, it's on the more of those events and opportunities are on the bigger campuses. So, I think that if they would bring it and promote it more to the smaller groups then you know, I think that'd be more and help support that belongingness and networking.”
>
> AH001: “I don't think they supported my networking. Abilities that much, I mean. Like I said, I just went to class and went on home.”

Participants also indicated that there were no mentoring opportunities for them. For example, AH007 said, “Yeah, with mentoring, it’s kind of difficult to fully participate in those opportunities because like I said, it’s on…the bigger campuses.” This indicates that since junior colleges tend to have small campuses, they offer fewer socialization, networking, and mentoring programs. Participants reported that this was a problem that limited what they got from their degree programs, and it inhibited their attitudes about the overall value of the degree.

In addition to missing networking, mentoring, and other socialization opportunities, participants also stated that their schools did not provide on-site childcare. AH002 explained, “It was very hard for me to find, like, a babysitter for me to go to the courses, though that would have bene really, really helpful.” This is an unmet need that made it hard for nontraditional students with young children to complete their degree programs. AH002 further remarked that “It was very hard for me to find, like, a babysitter for me to go to the courses, though that would have been really, really helpful.” This shows a deficit in the scope of what support services are offered to nontraditional students.

In general, participants said that they liked what services their schools offered, but there just were not enough of them. Participants said that they needed more access to support services, like tutoring and counseling. However, they also said that they needed more activities during the day, so that it was easier for nontraditional students to participate in them.

> AH001: “But I just feel like they may have benefited from having more day activities cause a lot of clubs and stuff.”

Participants also reported that they needed more diversity of services, such as having social, career planning, job placement, childcare, and other services offered by the bigger campuses. The information provided by participants indicates that their lived experiences as female African American nontraditional students in junior college programs were generally positive. Their schools were meeting many of their needs to

participate in a two-year degree program. However, where these programs were failing, the participants were in meeting their social and work-life-school balance needs.

Research Question 2

The second research question posed was, What support services and resources do female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs suggest are value-adding and necessary to reduce their attrition rates? Two themes from the narratives answer this question (see Table B4 in Appendix B). The first was what things act as barriers to graduation. This theme had six subthemes associated with it. The first issue was poor teacher attitude, characterized by teachers who were unhelpful, pessimistic, and combative towards students. The second subtheme was student procrastination, which described student behaviors that included time management problems, putting off doing school work until the last minute, and failing to invest enough time in school work to perform well. The third subtheme was that students feel like they have to do everything on their own, which describes a situation in which not enough guidance and support were offered to participants. The fourth subtheme was lack of social support at school, which represents a situation in which participants feel that the support needed was either missing or in short supply. The fifth subtheme observed was a lack of support at home, which described situations in which participants did not have support from their family members. The sixth subtheme was fine print for financial aid and academic progress is misleading and/or hard to understand, which describes a situation in which the written policies and guides were misleading, too complicated to understand, and/or did not provide the correct information for students to understand

what they needed to do to be successful in their degree program. It was important to look at these things, as they indicate what problems participants must overcome to graduate, and what risk factors impact participant attrition rates.

One complaint made by participants was that the financial aid process was unnecessarily complicated, creating situations whereby students did not know if they would qualify for financial aid for a semester or what they needed to do to ensure they would get their financial aid disbursement. For example, one participant spoke about not understanding the fine print associated with financial aid and how academic performance impacts the student's ability to continue to qualify for financial aid.

> AH003: "Everybody doesn't read the fine print. So now they're going in and like, OK, well, maybe I can start fresh this new semester, and you can't because you don't have the funds in order to fund what you need to fund because no one reached out to you and let you know, hey, you on the verge of failing this course and if you fail this course. You will not be able to use your financial aid in order to, you know, sign up the next semester."

Other participants wrote that they found the application process complicated because they needed to talk to different people for each financial aid program. AH005 said, "Had a different system because it's like the FAFSA stuff is totally different from the VA stuff."

Another barrier to graduation noted was poor teacher attitude. AH005 said, "I had this teach and you know how sometimes you'll get that teacher. She's not…She wasn't trying to help." AH005 was the only participant to identify poor teacher attitude as a problem, as most participants raved about the supportiveness of their teachers. However,

albeit rare, poor teacher attitude has a negative impact on student attitude, performance, and intent to complete their degree program.

Student procrastination was also noted as a barrier to graduation. AH007 shared that “First and foremost, I’m the biggest procrastinator there is.” Student attitudes and behaviors create barriers to graduation by causing dysfunction in study and work habits. These problematic behavior patterns can lead to lower grades, and higher course failure rates that derail student graduation abilities.

Another complaint made by participants was that they feel they must do everything on their own. AH003 reported that “A lot of the questions that I had, they could not answer for me, I had to do a lot of research on my own.” This situation discouraged participants and made them rethink if their degree program was worth completing. Similarly, participants reported having a lack of social support, both at home and at school AH001 said, “But I just feel like they may have benefited from having more day activities” because most activities, clubs, and organizations, were scheduled for evening and weekends when participants had other obligations. At home, participants did not have support either, making them feel even more isolated. AH003 said, “I didn’t have anyone [at school] to help guide me and I didn’t have anyone at home either.” A problem with having to do everything on their own is that they often find administrative tasks associated with managing their degree program confusing. For example, AH003 reported that “But everybody don't read the fine print. So now they're going in and like, OK, well, maybe I can start fresh this new semester, and you can't because you don't have the funds in order to fund what you need to fund because no one reached out to you and let you

know, hey, you on the verge of filling this course and if you fail this course. You will not be able to use your financial aid in order to, you know, sign up the next semester."

Finally, while there seems to be a lot of services available to the participants to support their success in their degree programs, there were still deficits. The main deficits were inadequate networking opportunities, missing mentoring programs, inadequate socialization, missing socialization opportunities for students living off-campus, lack of diversity of services offered, and shortages of critical support services, like tutoring, mentoring, and social events shortages.

AH006: "I feel like they should have more tutors."

AH006: "Be more events so we can reach out to each other besides just conversating because some people will struggle with just starting a conversation."

AH007: "Give more access to the resources and information."

The issues associated with the first theme of research question one responses need to be mitigated, leading to the second theme for RQ2: what students think would support graduation success. This theme had six subthemes associated with it. The first was adequate access to support services, which described the participants' opinion that having more of what is already offered would help them be successful in their degree programs. The second was mentorship opportunities. Participants sought mentorship opportunities to learn from professionals already in their desired field. The third subtheme was networking opportunities. Participants sought access to networking opportunities to facilitate the connections necessary for securing scholarships, internships, and work opportunities. The fourth subtheme was socialization opportunities for nontraditional

students. Participants sought opportunities to connect with peers, including non-traditional students, and others at their school, aiming to feel more part of the learning community and access social support while pursuing their degrees. The fifth subtheme was career coaching. Participants sought access to career coaching to plan their courses and understand the steps needed to achieve their desired career. The sixth subtheme was greater variety of support services. Participants wanted the variety of support services offered by larger campuses, so that they had more choices and opportunities.

Participants had a short list of what they felt would support their graduation success the most. The first things noted were adequate access to support services and socialization opportunities. While participants liked the support services that their schools offered, they stated that they were simply not offered in adequate amounts to keep them accessible. Participants wanted more tutors, computers, and advisors. They also wanted more support services and activities, although this was a point of disagreement. For example, some students felt that they didn't need more social support.

> AH002: "Yes, they could have more. My social well-being. I don't know if this is a…We don't get thrown out, but socially I I feel like I didn't really need a lot of support on the social aspect of it because….No, I don't feel like I really need it. Maybe some support in those two areas?"

In contrast, others felt that they were cut off from their learning community because they were not more involved in social activities and clubs.

> AH003: "Start doing but have like career days like we did in high school. 'Cause it's a junior college. Too small, but showing people. OK, you're here now. What

now? What can I do with the classes that I'm that I am taking now? Because sometimes school get gets overwhelming. OK. Maybe you don't want to take it to the university level. Maybe you just want to stop here at at this junior college. What can I do with this degree? It's not enough of that type of information that is being given out, of course."

AH003: "I feel like if you aren't a part of a specific club, you don't have that extra help or that extra access to networking. Now being that I was an ambassador, I had that, but I had friends that were going that they did not feel like they belonged."

AH007: "Of course, this is one of the smaller campuses, so we don't get a lot of the larger networking events. So that kinda makes it difficult."

Participants felt that if they had more support services, then they would be in a better position to plan out their education and careers better. Participants noted that they felt there was a need to promote the accessibility of clubs and organizations to nontraditional students because, as AH003 stated, "I feel like if you aren't a part of a specific club, you don't have that extra help or that extra access to networking." Also, AH004 said that she felt it was important to get nontraditional students more involved in the social elements of the learning community, and "getting the students involved in different activities" to keep them connected and supported.

Participants also stated that their graduation success would benefit from mentorship and networking. AH003 said that it would be beneficial to have "group sessions or offering mentoring groups" to provide students with more social and

networking support. AH007 added, “Of course, this is one of the smaller campuses, so we don’t get a lot of the larger networking events. So that kinda makes it difficult.” These comments show that being on a small campus and as a nontraditional student limits networking and mentoring opportunities. By facilitating these opportunities, participants would have better access to resources and experiences that would contribute to their self-efficacy to graduate and have a successful career.

Finally, participants revealed that they needed and wanted a greater variety of support services. Participants reported that their schools did not offer all the support services they wanted, making networking difficult to access and use.

> AH007: “Yeah, with the networking, it's kind of difficult to fully participate in those opportunities because like I said, it's on the more of those events and opportunities are on the bigger campuses. So, I think that if they would bring it and promote it more to the smaller groups then you know, I think that'd be more and help support that belongingness and networking.”

Another addition they wanted to see was career coaching. For example, participants wanted careers days and career coaching.

> AH003: “start doing…career days like we did in high school.”
>
> AH004: “Student intervention and career coach and also tutoring and different other services that students may need.”

These suggestions provide school administrators and advocacy groups with ideas on what female African American nontraditional students need to improve their graduation rates.

Summary

Considering the disparately high rate of attrition among female African American nontraditional students, particularly in two-year junior college degree programs, a qualitative study was conducted to investigate the situation. A phenomenological study design was used to analyze the lived experiences of female African American nontraditional students' access to and opinions about the support services offered by their schools. Eight participants were sampled and interviewed using Teams. An audio recording of each interview was made and transcribed. Coding and theming were done to abstract out the essence of the phenomenon under review.

Four main themes were observed, with each having additional subthemes. The first theme was good access to support services that meet the school's need, and its subthemes were financial aid, academic support, mental health services, multiple communication channels, and access to technological resources. The second theme was moderate to poor access to support services that address students' needs, and its subthemes were inadequate networking opportunities, missing mentoring, missing childcare support services, inadequate socialization opportunities for students living off-campus, need more of the support services offered, and missing career planning and placement services. The third theme was barriers to graduation, and its subthemes were poor teacher attitude, student procrastination, students feel like they have to do everything on their own, lack of social support at school, lack of support at home, and fine print for financial aid and academic progress is misleading and/or hard to understand. The final theme was what students think would support graduation success, and its

subthemes were adequate access to support services, mentorship opportunities, networking opportunities, socialization opportunities for nontraditional students, career coaching, and greater variety of support services.

The first RQ was, How do female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs describe the support services offered to them by their schools? In general, the participants were satisfied with the financial, academic, and psychological support services they received. However, many participants revealed that they felt socially isolated and not part of the learning community due to their nontraditional status and because most lived off campus. The second RQ was, What support services and resources do female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs suggest are value-adding and necessary to reduce their attrition rates? Participants stated they would like more of what is already offered in terms of tutors, academic support, communication, and organized social and networking events, as there were not enough resources available to meet their needs completely. In Chapter 5, I will provide an interpretation of these findings, draw conclusions, and offer more information about the implications of the study's findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe experiences with support services and to suggest changes to improve support for higher graduation rates among female African American nontraditional students participating in two-year degree programs offered by junior colleges. The researcher used a qualitative methodology to describe the experiences of female nontraditional African American students in a junior college program. Specifically, the study aimed to understand the support offered by two-year junior college degree programs and identify gaps between what these students perceive they need to support their degree program completion and what is provided by the institutions of higher education.

I used the qualitative study design to explore the experiences of female nontraditional African American students attending two-year junior college degree programs was phenomenology. Phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of a phenomenon by studying it through direct observations and interactions with individuals who are experiencing the phenomenon in real-time (Van Manen, 2016). The type of phenomenology selected for the study was phenomenology of sociality, which aims to create an understanding of how social interactions and dynamics influence perceptions of the targeted phenomenon (Hegel et al., 1977).

Eight participants were sampled and interviewed. The findings indicated that the participants were satisfied with the financial, academic, and psychological support services they received. However, many participants reported feeling socially isolated and not part of the learning community due to their nontraditional status and because most of

them lived off campus. Participants also revealed that they wanted more of what their schools already offered, specifically tutors, academic support, communication, and organized social and networking events, as there were not enough resources available to meet their needs completely. Chapter Five provides an interpretation of these findings, draws conclusions, and offers further information about the implications of the study's results.

Interpretation of the Findings

The study's theoretical construct consisted of two primary theories. The first was Bean's Industrial Model of Student Attrition. The first element of this model was the observation that people are less likely to detach or withdraw from group-approved activity if they share the same values as the group (Bean, 1981). When applied to female African American nontraditional students, this means that students who have values aligned with those of their successful classmates are more likely to complete their degree programs. The data collected by this study supported this prediction, showing that students who were more dedicated to completing their degree program also valued personal accountability, self-motivation, and goal-oriented strategies for academic achievement.

The second element associated with Bean's model was that student attrition resulted from a "failure of the adult socialization process" (Bean, 1981, p. 5). The findings from this study showed that socialization opportunities were a deficit area noted by female African American nontraditional students. Participants explained that socialization events were often held in limited quantities and only on campus, which

disadvantaged the target population because many of them did not live on campus. Additionally, the participants' work and family responsibilities limited their abilities to participate in social events hosted by their schools, further isolating them from opportunities to socialize with their peers.

The third element of Bean's model that applies to the current study is that having college plans was the most impactful variable for academic achievement (Sewell & Hauser, 1972). This is another area noted by the participants as a deficit. They often commented that they had little help planning for the next steps in their academic careers, as well as in their efforts to complete their current degree programs. However, they did have adequate help and guidance related to academic performance with current classes, which they received from their teachers, academic advisors, and tutors.

The second theory contributing to the theoretical construct for this study was the Importance of Intention Model. This model highlighted the importance of both social and personal components to influence behavioral intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The social components of this model include beliefs or expectations of important references and motivation to comply with those referents. The participants indicated that they felt disconnected from their peers and the learning community because of their nontraditional student status and because they often lived off campus. Their motivation, therefore, did not tend to stem from the social elements linked to their schools and classmates. Instead, it tended to be tied to their families, particularly their children, who served as a significant source of motivation.

AH004: “And I also my daughter is my biggest motivation to complete my degree 'cause I have to take care of her. So it's kind of, you know. I don't wanna give up 'cause if I'm giving up, you know I'm giving up on possibilities for her future.”

The personal components of the Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) model explain that perceived consequences and evaluation of consequences of decisions influence behavioral intentions. Participants indicated that they were aware of the consequences of not completing their degree, and they viewed those consequences as significant. For example, participants often cited that they linked their success in their degree program to the success of their family’s future.

AH003: “I might go in and do a shift before I go to class because I gotta pay for my classes and I gotta pay for my books and I wanted to go on and go to a university 'cause I knew I had to do something with my life because. I couldn't pay for school, so I had to set myself up so I can at least set my my future children up for success.”

AH004: “I have to think about that one as far as distractions. I was at first coming in, you know, like parties and everything. But I know since I have a daughter, I have to really focus.”

Another concept related to the two models discussed is the theoretical construct of self-efficacy and intentions to graduate. Cohen and Kelly (2019) predicted that community college students with low math self-efficacy would be less likely to pursue a four-year degree in STEM fields or experience higher attrition rates. The participants interviewed had a healthy sense of self-efficacy, which was reinforced by support from

teachers, advisors, and tutors. However, where they were less self-efficacious was the area of what it would take to translate their two-year degree into a successful career or a successful transfer to a four-year program.

> AH003: “What now? What can I do with the classes that I'm that I am taking now? Because sometimes school get gets overwhelming. OK. Maybe you don't want to take it to the university level. Maybe you just want to stop here at at this junior college. What can I do with this degree? It's not enough of that type of information that is being given out, of course.”
>
> AH004: “Student intervention and career coach and also tutoring and different other services that students may need.”

The literature review provided evidence that student attrition was associated with a lack of alignment between support resources and students’ needs at community colleges (Bennett et al., 2021; Weiss et al., 2018). Based on participant responses, most of their academic, mental health, and financial needs were well-met by support services offered by the participants’ schools. However, there were several areas of deficit, including childcare, adequate quantities of academic support services, socialization events for nontraditional students, and networking opportunities.

> AH002: “I am a single mother. I pretty much felt like they could have had. Some type of support groups for just single moms, or a place where I could have taken my child while I attend some of the classes in the afternoon. It was very hard for me to find, like, a babysitter for me to go to the courses, though that would have been really, really helpful.”

AH003: “I feel like if you aren't a part of a specific club, you don't have that extra help or that extra access to networking.”

AH003: “They didn't see or know where they wanted to take their future, so being that they didn't have the academic. The academic help, nor any type of networking help that they may that may would have helped push them further.” They just said freak it and never came back.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the above information. First, female African American nontraditional students have many factors working in their favor that support their chances of completing their two-year degrees. Their schools offer them good support for academic factors, and some social-psychological and environmental factors are promoting self-efficacy and beliefs that will foster academic success. If these factors could be further developed and improved, the target demographic would be better positioned to graduate.

Second, the target population lacks the social resources necessary to sustain their motivation and remain resilient to the financial, psychological, and environmental challenges that may arise during their journey to graduation. The students explained that they need more opportunities to socialize with their peers, teachers, and professionals in their field of study. They also need more support to help them manage their work-school-life balance, such as childcare. If schools can better align support services with what the participants noted was needed, then their degree program success rates can be improved.

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of the study was that it involved only eight participants. This limited the representativeness of the sample and also limited the scope and depth of the descriptions of student experiences as female African American nontraditional students in a two-year junior college degree program. The researcher mitigated this limitation by acknowledging it and recommending additional research that incorporates a larger and more diverse sample. Time and money were also limitations of this study. The researcher mitigated these limitations by employing effective time and resource management, as well as utilizing the resources and support provided by the researcher's school. Personal bias was another major limitation of the study. It was hard to eliminate all personal biases, mainly since the researcher identified with the participants and they all grew assimilated into the dominant culture, where race, sex, and socioeconomic status significantly impacted social status, access to resources, and treatment.

To mitigate the self-serving bias problem, the researcher employed bracketing as a technique to neutralize her biases while engaging with participants and by conferring with her dissertation team about the objectivity of her data collection and analysis (Amasino et al., 2023). She used bracketing by adding a statement to the top of her interview and data analysis protocols to keep herself aware of potential biases that could influence her responses to the participants and their data. For example, the researcher needed to remind herself that she was a nontraditional female student, so she approached this research project with preexisting ideas about what this identity entails and how it impacts student experiences and performance. During data analysis, she posted a similar

bracketing statement at the top of her data collection instruments to remind herself to neutralize her opinions before completing the phenomenological analysis of her research.

Finally, the researcher addressed retrospective bias, which occurs when a researcher or research subject evaluates the past more favorably than they would the same situation if it were occurring right now (Yamagata & Miura, 2023). To minimize the problem of researcher self-serving and retrospective biases, she practiced mindfulness to ensure she was aware of her personal biases, opinions about the study population and sample, and reactions to participants, so she could alter her behavior and thought patterns to keep them as objective and neutral as possible.

Recommendations

The study's findings inspire several recommendations for future research that will build upon its strengths in various ways. First, future researchers may utilize a larger sample of female African American nontraditional students in two-year junior college degree programs to gain more information about what drives or inhibits their success. This recommendation will help overcome the limitations in diversity and inclusiveness of the current study. This can be achieved by using a larger and more diverse sample, such as recruiting more than 20 female African American nontraditional students from two-year degree programs at a single or multiple junior colleges. Other researchers can replicate the study's design with this larger sample.

Second, future research may consider alternative study design options, such as case studies or cohort studies, instead of a phenomenological design. If a case study is selected, it will help the researcher to gain rich descriptions of what these target

demographics experience and how those experiences differ by school or region of the country. In contrast, if the cohort study design option is used, it may compare female African American nontraditional students in two-year degree programs at junior colleges to a variety of cohorts, including male African American nontraditional students in two-year degree programs, female African American traditional students in two-year degree programs, female nontraditional students in two-year degree programs, or female white nontraditional students in two-year degree programs at junior colleges.

Another recommendation for future research is to test the efficacy of the factors identified in this study's findings that support female African American nontraditional students in achieving graduation success in two-year degree programs. Future researchers can test, for example, the effect of providing students with more socialization opportunities on graduation rates. Future researchers can also explore and compare the efficacy of various socialization support services, such as networking, mentoring, clubs, and general socializing events, on graduation rates. This will help identify the interventions that offer the best return on investment for schools.

Implications

The findings from this study provide specific guidance on what works and what does not work for female African American nontraditional students in two-year junior college degree programs. This information can be used to justify an increase in funding for effective and valued support services, such as tutoring and academic advising services. It can also be used to justify investments in new support services, such as on-site childcare, networking opportunities, and additional social events for students. This

will help individuals access the specific services they need to be successful, which could improve the success of families and promote the value of higher education to a new generation. At the organizational level, these recommendations can improve graduation rates and attract more students. Finally, at the societal level, these recommendations have the potential to reduce socioeconomic disparities, improve the quality of life of the target demographic, and improve the qualifications of local, state, and national workforces by providing the support needed to achieve higher graduation rates among female African American nontraditional students in two-year degree programs at junior colleges.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe experiences with support services and to suggest changes to improve support for higher graduation rates among female African American nontraditional students participating in two-year degree programs offered by junior colleges. The study's findings showed that, in general, female African American nontraditional students in two-year degree programs at junior colleges were satisfied with the support services they received in the areas of academic performance, financial aid, and mental health. However, they also noted that having more of these support services would be helpful, especially having more tutors available. Where support services failed to meet student needs were in the areas of socialization, networking, and childcare. These are areas where more funding is needed to help distribute the socialization, belongingness, and networking benefits offered by institutions of higher education more equitably. Fortunately, the necessary changes are easy to implement and are highly likely to improve the cost-effectiveness of investments

in student support services. If implemented, these support services will help to improve graduation rates, attract additional students to the school and its degree programs, enhance the school's education brand, improve the qualifications of the workforce, reduce student debt, and increase the quality of life for the target demographic. These are all worthwhile outcomes to pursue.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

_____

Participant ID #

_____

Time and Date of Interview

_____

Interviewer Name

Academic Factors

1. What support services does your school offer to students to help them achieve academic success?
2. How does your school communicate what support services it offers?
3. How well does your school support academic performance?
4. What does your school not do that you feel would help you successfully complete your degree program? Why would this help?

Social-Psychological Factors

5. How does your school engage and/or support your academic goals and objectives?
6. How does your school engage and/or support your professional goals and objectives?

7. How does your school engage and/or support your personal goals and objectives.
8. How does your school support your belongingness and networking needs?
9. How well does your school support the development of your relationship with faculty and professional/academic mentors?
10. What could your school do to improve your social and psychological well-being while you pursue your degree?

Environmental Factors

11. What and how well does your school support your financial needs while you pursue your degree?
12. How well does your school support your transfer to a four-year degree program at another institution?

Self-Efficacy

13. How well does your school develop and enhance your self-efficacy related to completing your degree program?
14. What could your school do to develop and enhance your self-efficacy related to completing your degree program that it does not do currently?

Attitudes

15. How would you describe your attitudes about the importance of completing your degree program?
16. Describe how your school creates or does not create positive attitudes about the importance of completing your degree program?

Other Information

17. What else would you like to share about what contributes to your ability to complete your degree program?
18. What else would you like to share about what detracts from your ability to complete your degree program?

Thank you for sharing your experiences with the support services offered by your school. I will provide you with a transcript of your responses so you can verify and approve the content that will be included in the study.

Appendix B: Tables

Table B1

Codes

Code	*n*
Financial aid support	34
Distracted	30
Tutoring	22
Need networking support	21
I don't know	19
Academic advising/advisor	18
Need opportunities for group events/activities/support	18
Family support and encouragement	17
Counseling/counselors	15
Family motivation	15
Teachers offering support	13
Financial support [had]	12
Need check-ins	10
Students commute miss out	10
Complicated financial aid processes	10
Inadequate social events	10
Scholarships	10
Need socialization opportunities	10
School–life conflicts	8
Inadequate support services	7
Email	7
Mental health services	7
Need more one-on-one	7
Flyers	6
Disconnected from social experience if you did not live on campus	6
Job placement services [need]	6
You have to do everything on your own	6
Check in with students [had]	5
Inadequate Support at Home	5
Self-motivation	5
School website	5
More tutors/tutoring services [need]	5
Bulletin board	4
Emotional support	4
Encouragement	4
Need extra help	4
Academic support	3
Access to computers	3
Nothing offered	3
Computer resources [had]	3

Code	*n*
Facebook/social media [communication]	3
FAFSA help [had]	3
Printing services	3
Fine print misleading/hidden requirements	3
Need help to get a head start	3
Grants [had]	3
Inconsistent access to support services	3
Library	3
Parties	3
After-school programs	2
Childcare needed	2
Internships	2
Overwhelming	2
Procrastination	2
Taking easy way out of work	1
Could offer list of school that accept transfers	1
[Problem] Couldn't answer student questions	1
ADA	1
Advocate for students [Had]	1
All types of support	1
Bad teachers	1
Bad attitudes	1
Be paired with other students [could have]	1
Career coach [need]	1
Career days [could offer]	1
Did have meetup sessions on Tuesdays (all students)	1
Displays	1
Posters	1
Do research ourselves	1
Feel too old to be at school	1
Film program	1
Financial burden	1
Need to get involved in different activities, clubs, and organizations	1
Give more access to resources	1
Give students information based on need [have]	1
[Student] good attitudes [helps]	1
Don't need social support	1
Don't want to ask questions or for help	1
[Need] Mentoring	1
Nontraditional status created feeling of not belonging	1
[Problem] Small campuses don't offer same resources and activities	1

Note. FAFSA = Free Application for Federal Student Aid; ADA = Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990.

Table B2

Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
Good access to support services that meet the school's needs	Financial aid
	Academic support
	Mental health services
	Multiple communication channels
	Access to technology resources
Moderate-to-poor access to support services that address students' needs	Inadequate networking opportunities
	Missing mentoring
	Missing childcare support/services
	Inadequate socialization opportunities for students living off-campus
	Need for more of the support services offered
	Missing career planning and placement services
Barriers to graduation	Poor teacher attitudes
	Poor student attitudes
	Student procrastination
	Students feel like they have to do everything on their own
	Lack of social support at school
	Lack of support at home
	Fine print for financial aid and academic progress that is misleading and/or hard to understand
What students think would support graduation success	Adequate access to support services
	Mentorship opportunities
	Networking opportunities
	Socialization opportunities for nontraditional students
	Career coaching
	Greater variety of support services

Table B3

Themes, Subthemes, and Illustrative Participant Responses for Research Question 1

Research question	Theme	Subtheme	Example quote
What are the lived experiences of female nontraditional African American students in junior college programs, particularly regarding the support services offered to them by their schools?	Good access to support services that meet the school's needs	Financial aid	"Financial needs actually through the financial aid office and also they have satellite for an example. I kind of inquired about the WI where there was a representative in that office. I need it if my financial aid was kind of running out, that was a kind of like a pathway to where I can have other financial resources. If I really need it. And they would actually pay for the class." (AH004)
		Academic support	"I think the teachers are very, very motivating. They make sure everyone is on track if they see anyone like slacking on their work or. Not doing their assignments, it pretty much addresses the whole class and just tell us all to stay focus." (AH002)
			"Our teachers were also, you know, pull us aside and have extra help for us as well." (AH005)
		Mental health services	"Like a friend of mine, she actually was going through a divorce and her grades was down low. And what helped her was counseling mental counseling from the school. And that helped her, her academics to be successful." (AH008)
			"The mental health center counseling services where they ask us students to say, like, if I'm going through anything, I can talk to someone and just kind of help, you know, talk me through it." (AH004)
		Multiple communication channels	"My school says that emails on our student accounts and they tell us often what services they have available." (AH002)
		Access to technological resources	"They actually communicate them through social media, posting flyers all around campus, and also emailing students." (AH004)
			"They could send an email because as a student it was necessary almost mandatory that you check your school email." (AH008)

Research question	Theme	Subtheme	Example quote
	Moderate-to-poor access to support services that address students' needs	Inadequate networking opportunities	“I don't think they supported my networking. Abilities that much, I mean. Like I said, I just went to class and went on home.” (AH001)
		Missing mentoring	“Yeah, with the networking, it's kind of difficult to fully participate in those opportunities because like I said, it's on the more of those events and opportunities are on the bigger campuses. So, I think that if they would bring it and promote it more to the smaller groups then you know, I think that'd be more and help support that belongingness and networking.” (AH007)
		Missing childcare support/services	“It was very hard for me to find, like, a babysitter for me to go to the courses, though that would have been really, really helpful.” (AH002)
		Inadequate socialization opportunities for students living off-campus	“Socially I I feel like I didn't really need a lot of support.” (AH002)
			“But I just feel like they may have benefited from having more day activities cause a lot of clubs and stuff.” (AH001)
		Need for more of the support services offered	"Maybe to give more access to the resources and information." (AH007)
			“But I just feel like they may have benefited from having more day activities cause a lot of clubs and stuff.” (AH001)
			"I guess for psychological would be a good space for students to relax and socialize and maybe even expansion of mental health resources or making them more accessible." (AH007)
			“I feel like they should have more tutors.” (AH006)
			“Be more events so we can reach out to each other besides just conversating because some people will struggle with just starting a conversation.” (AH006)
		Missing career planning and placement services	"We had maybe one career fair." (AH001)
			"Start doing but have like career days like we did in high school." (AH003)

Table B4

Themes, Subthemes, and Illustrative Participant Responses for Research Question 2

Research Question	Theme	Subtheme	Quotes	Participant Code
What Support services and resources do female nontraditional African American Students in junior college programs describe as value-adding and necessary to reduce their attrition rates?	Barriers to Graduation	Poor Teacher Attitudes	"I had this teacher and you know how sometimes you'll get that teacher. She's not. She wasn't trying to help."	AH005
		Student Procrastination	"First and foremost, I'm the biggest procrastinator there is."	AH007
		Students Feel Like They Have to Do Everything on Their Own	"I do not feel as though it helped me academically. A lot of the questions that I had, they could not answer for me, I had to do a lot of research on my own."	AH003
		Lack of Social Support at School	“Socially I I feel like I didn't really need a lot of support.”	AH002
			“But I just feel like they may have benefited from having more day activities cause a lot of clubs and stuff.”	AH001
		Lack of Support at Home	"I didn't have anyone there to help guide me and I didn't have anyone at home either."	AH003

		Fine Print for Financial Aid and Academic Progress Is Misleading and/or Hard to Understand	"But everybody don't read the fine print. So now they're going in and like, OK, well, maybe I can start fresh this new semester, and you can't because you don't have the funds in order to fund what you need to fund because no one reached out to you and let you know, hey, you on the verge of filling this course and if you fail this course. You will not be able to use your financial aid in order to, you know, sign up the next semester."	AH003
	What Students Think Would Support Graduation Success	Adequate Access to Support Services	"I don't feel like I really need it [referring to social support]."	AH002
			"Have like career days like we did in high school. 'Cause it's a junior college. Too small, but showing people. OK, you're here now. What now? What can I do with the classes that I'm that I am taking now? Because sometimes school get gets overwhelming. OK. Maybe you don't want to take it to the university level. Maybe you just want to stop here at at this junior college. What can I do with this degree? It's not enough of that type of information that is being given out, of course."	AH003
			"I feel like if you aren't a part of a specific club, you don't have that extra help or that extra access to networking. Now being that I was an ambassador, I had that, but I had friends that were going that they did not feel like they belonged."	AH003

Mentorship Opportunities	"So right now only thing that I can think of is having. A therapist on campus that making either hold those group sessions or offering mentoring groups so like having students that would love to actually."	AH003
Networking Opportunities	“Of course, this is one of the smaller campuses, so we don't get a lot of the larger networking events. So that kinda makes it difficult.”	AH007
Socialization Opportunities for Nontraditional Students	"Previously, like I mentioned, more social. Getting the students involved in different activities. "	AH004
Career Coaching	"Start doing but have like career days like we did in high school."	AH003
	"Student intervention and career coach and also tutoring and different other services that students may need."	AH004
Greater Variety of Support Services	"Yeah, with the networking, it's kind of difficult to fully participate in those opportunities because like I said, it's on the more of those events and opportunities are on the bigger campuses."	AH007

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