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# An Exploration of Male College Student Departure in the Southcentral United States

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# Walden University

College of Education

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E. Ted Siebert

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2018

Abstract

An Exploration of Male College Student Departure in the Southcentral United States

by

E. Ted Siebert

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

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## Abstract

Male college students' attrition has been a concern for higher education for 3 decades. This study focused on why young male college students leave postsecondary education before graduating. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences former male college students that led to their decision to leave a community college in the Southcentral United States. Research questions in this generic qualitative study were: How do men describe their experiences leading to the decision to discontinue their community college education and what supports do men perceive colleges could offer to support their decision to continue postsecondary education. Astin's theory of student involvement, Bean's industrial model of student learning, and Tinto's theory of integration served as the conceptual framework for the study. Open coding of interviews with 8 college-age men revealed 5 themes: a sense of not belonging, financial concerns, challenging timeframes in college life, personal demands and challenges, and desired campus supports. Findings and recommendations may result in positive social change by informing educators and school leaders about reasons men leave college, thereby potentially leading to targeted retention efforts. Positive social change may result from offering more support to male students, particularly focused on time management for those with off-campus jobs, creating more means to instill a sense of belonging, offering early and substantive academic advising and additional financial aid advice and resources, supporting faculty to design more engaging teaching methods, and offering exit interviews.

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## Dedication

To the men I interviewed who started college but did not complete a degree program. The fortunes of fate have dealt these men with unfortunate challenges and unattainable goals. Finding that a sense of belonging was challenging, financial concerns and ineligibility for grants or loans, challenging time frames both in college and outside college life, personal demands and challenges, and desired campus supports were some of the factors these men faced in college. It is with humility that I present this study to the men who are so far unfortunate not to have the success that comes with a college degree.

## Acknowledgments

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Since 1982, retention and graduation rates for men in postsecondary education have been decreasing, and the trend seems likely to continue into the foreseeable future (Dwyer, Hodson, & McCloud, 2013). The ratio of female to male college students is approximately 2:1 with the percentage of those who graduate at 60% for women and 40% for men (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006; Conger & Long, 2010; Goldin, Katz, & Kuziemko, 2006; McLennan & Averett, 2002; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). Male college student retention, therefore, has become a concern for institutions of higher education (Dwyer et al., 2013). In addition, because male retention, attendance, and graduation rates may not increase anytime soon, the factors causing this challenge of retention seems to be within some male students and their inability to meet the demands of higher education academic standards (Djulovic & Li, 2013; Salazar, 2014).

A survey of recent peer-reviewed research found that there were few studies on male college student attrition in higher education from the perspectives of the male college students themselves. This gap in the research indicates a need for a better understanding of the experiences of male college students who leave higher education without graduating. Reports have documented that the lagging male college student attendance in higher education starts in K-12 where they have not kept up with their female counterparts' achievement levels (Conger & Long, 2010). According to Conger and Long (2010) and Kleinfeld (2009a), somewhere during the K-12 experience male college students have been left behind either because of a lack of academic skills or through other challenges in the education system such as time management, adapting to

college life, and financial concerns. According to Reynolds and Burge (2007), female college students currently excel in higher education, whereas before 1972 they were academically behind male college students.

Female college students' attendance has been beneficial for higher education because it allows for greater opportunities for women and a growing tuition base (Dwyer et al., 2013). Women and men often pursue different fields of study in college, and often male students find other avenues or pursuits outside of higher education (Pereira, 2014). For example, men explore military service, industry or trade occupations, and self-employment outside of college to earn money (Pereira, 2014). The reasons men avoid or leave higher education could be their perception of the importance of academics and that long-term economic value can be achieved earlier in a trade or vocational study (Jepsen, Troske, & Coomes, 2014). Once male students enter college, the question becomes one of persistence and staying ability.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem that I explored in this study was the attrition of young men from college during their first 2 years of study (Goldin et al., 2006; Reynolds & Burge, 2007; Wells, Seifert, Padgett, Park, & Umbach, 2011). This trend of low male college attendance continues and may continue, according to recent research (Cook & Sacks, 2011; Wells et al., 2011). Since the early 1980s, a shift from the predominance in attendance and graduation of male college students to that of female students has occurred due to several social factors and changing demographics (Wells et al., 2011). Little current peer-reviewed research exists regarding the experiences of the men who

leave postsecondary education except for several studies specifically directed toward African Americans (Harper & Davis, 2012; Harper & Harris, 2012; Kiyama, Luca, Raucci, & Crump-Owens, 2014; Proctor & Truscott, 2012; Strayhorn, 2008a).

Research findings have shown that the reasons male students leave higher education range from their experiences in K-12, to a lack of finances, to issues associated with family support, to a general academic persistence (Buchmann, DiPrete, & McDaniel, 2008; Burns & Slack, 2015; Djulovic & Li, 2013; Jacobs, 1996; Kleinfeld, 2009b; Wells et al., 2011; Wohlgemuth et al., 2007). A few studies have indicated that academic success is a student who has the persistence and perseverance and has developed patterns of dedication (D'Amico, Dika, Elling, Algozzine, & Ginn, 2014). An issue for postsecondary institutions is the need to identify and address increasing attrition rates for these young college men (Grillo & Leist, 2013). This phenomenon is characterized by the inability of postsecondary institutions to retain male college students, and research is lacking that explores attrition in these students from their perspectives. In this study, I explored the experiences of former male college students who left school after their first or second year to understand their experiences with postsecondary education prior to their departure. The exploration of their common or shared experiences before they chose to leave school may shed light on why only four of 10 students are male on higher education campuses.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of former male college students and what they perceived led to their decision to leave a community

college in the Southcentral United States. The participants were male college students who left higher education within the past 2–3 years after attending for only a few semesters. Analysis of these shared experiences may contribute to a better understanding of the factors and experiences that resulted in their departure.

Using a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis, I explored the perspectives of these male students regarding their experiences during college determining whether there were commonalities in these perspectives, and to identify this population's decision to leave postsecondary education. These findings may provide information relevant to this understudied and under-researched lack of the gender parity phenomenon that has existed in higher education for over 30 years (Conger & Long, 2010; Jia & Maloney, 2015). By identifying the experiences of male students who have left college, I have contributed to the research on the increasing attrition rates of male students in higher education. In addition, this study provides information that may lead to practical implications for administrators to begin to address the problems of male college student attrition in higher education.

### **Research Questions**

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do men describe their experiences leading to the decision to discontinue their community college education?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What supports do men perceive colleges could offer to support their decision to continue postsecondary education?



### **Conceptual Framework**

Astin's (1977, 1984) theory of student involvement, Bean's (1983) industrial model of student learning, and Tinto's (1993) theory of integration served as the conceptual framework for this study. Both Astin's and Tinto's theories assert that the more students are involved with and integrated into their college environments, the more successful they will be in college. Astin theorized that the psychological and physical investments students made to enhance their academic experiences were crucial components of their involvement in college life. Also, Astin noted that involvement could be conceptualized as the quantity of experience (time spent studying) as well as the quality of the experience (what students learn from studying). Consequently, students who are more involved in their college experiences are more likely to do well, which may influence male college students' decision to remain enrolled or leave the institution.

Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure holds that the level of a student's integration into the academic and social environments in higher education significantly influences their decision to remain in school or depart (Burkholder & Holland, 2014; Lillis, 2011; Soria, Stebleton, & Huesman, 2013; Stagg & Kimmons, 2014). Students' backgrounds, skill levels, financial resources, and dispositions affect their development and integration into college (DeAngelo, 2014; Garza, Bain, & Kupczynski, 2014; Morrison, 2012). The more students integrate into college culture, the more likely they are to be successful, (Pleitz, MacDougall, Terry, Buckley, & Campbell, 2015), which may also influence male college students' decisions to remain or leave college. Astin's (1977, 1984) theory of student involvement and Tinto's (1993) theory of integration

served as the conceptual framework for this study because they framed the experiences of young men who chose to leave college.

Bean (1983) focused on student learning in relation to background and social factors. Bean developed a psychological-environmental model of student retention to connect psychological and background variables to social and academic integration factors to understand student learning and outcomes, such as academic success and student retention. Bean's model adds a psychological dimension to the study of student attrition and an understanding of student's satisfaction within the scope of persistence. Bean patterned his industrial model of student attrition after an employee satisfaction model substituting student attrition as a variable. I discuss these theories and the lack of current peer-reviewed research on the attrition of male college students in postsecondary education in greater detail in Chapter 2.

### **Nature of the Study**

I used interviews and focused on the experiences of men who left community college before completing a degree or program. This generic qualitative study (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002) allowed participants to speak for themselves regarding their own experiences, which included familial, scholarly, financial, or any experiences leading up to their decision to leave. According to Creswell (2007), the goal of qualitative research "is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied" (p. 187). For this study, I interviewed eight men aged 18–25 from a community college in the Southcentral United States who left postsecondary education in their first or second year before the completion of a degree or program. I

used the software program, NVivo (version 11) to categorize, collate, assess, and code data to help provide validity.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Attrition:* A student entering but not completing a community college program or degree (Strom & Savage, 2014).

*Retention:* Efforts by schools to address and lower attrition and keep students enrolled. These efforts often focus on the factors influencing students' departure from school, including those related to individual student preparedness and institutional aspects such as financial support and academic counseling (Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013).

### **Assumptions**

One assumption was that the participants had a clear understanding and appreciation for the interview questions. Another assumption was that the participants were open and provided honest accounts of their experiences once assured of the strict confidentiality of the data and information gathered. Finally, because the participants were currently outside of the college's influence (i.e., they were no longer enrolled), I assumed that they would be more transparent about academic experiences.

### **Limitations**

The relevant categories described by the participants were limited to the experiences they encountered leading up to their decision to leave college and did not include experiences that may have acted as unforeseeable events. This was especially true

if the participants did not recognize these events as relative to their experiences during their time before leaving school

### **Scope and Delimitations**

I exclusively focused on male college students at a community college in the Southcentral region of the United States and the experiences this group of students encountered that led to their decision to leave college before completing a program or degree. The scope of the study related to this specific geographic region and higher education. Consequently, findings from this study may not be generalized to populations in other regions or at other education levels.

### **Significance of the Study**

Findings from this study may be significant for both research and practice. This study adds to the body of research regarding the reasons men may be leaving college. The study is significant since the data provides reasons why male students leave the college experience. The research findings may contribute to the gap in the research by providing a better understanding the male college student experience and therefore help facilitate ways for administrators and educators to address male college student attrition rates by developing effective retention strategies and programs. This study is significant in identifying additional areas for further research.

### **Summary**

Male college students have attended higher education institutions in lower numbers since 1982; however, there is limited research that explores male college attrition rates (Conger & Long, 2010). Therefore, I focused on the experiences of male

college students who had recently left community college before completing a program or degree. More research is needed to discover the reasons for increasing attrition rates of young males in higher education (Kleinfeld, 2009b), especially from the perspectives of the young men themselves.

In Chapter 2, I summarize and synthesize the peer-reviewed research that I used as a basis for this study. Additionally, I expand on the foundational theories that I used to ground and frame the study. Finally, in the next chapter, I elaborate on the recent relevant research literature regarding student retention and the attrition of college students in higher education.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the experiences of male college students who left a community college in the Southcentral United States before completing a program or degree. The central problem that I addressed in this study is the increasing attrition of college aged men in U.S. higher education. Research indicates that student involvement, engagement, and integration into campus communities can enhance college student persistence and retention (Bennett, 2014; DeNicco, Harrington, & Fogg, 2015). Effective study strategies and academic preparedness are also important factors for achieving academic success in higher education (Combs et al., 2010; Marrs & Sigler, 2012). Little is known, however, about male student attrition and retention in Southcentral U.S. community colleges. I designed this study to provide an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of male students who left college before earning a degree or completing a program. Chapter 2 includes the literature search strategy, conceptual framework, and a review of the empirical literature that addressed the attrition of men in higher education.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

This literature review includes an assessment of peer-reviewed articles and relevant documentation of the issue of decreasing male attendance in higher education. I found relevant peer-reviewed articles using the following keywords: *male attrition, male retention, male attendance, graduation, university, college, community college, postsecondary male attainment, gender attrition, gender gap in higher education, postsecondary enrollment, persistence, performance, engagement, gender diversity*, and

*postsecondary education*. I searched databases and search engines including the Walden University Library, EBSCO, ERIC, Google Scholar, Education Research Complete, SAGE Premier, and the Academic Educational Research Association. I also searched relevant journals such as the *Journal of College Student Retention*, *Annual Review of Sociology*, and *Research in Higher Education*. I used other resources to gather background and contextual information, including the *National Center for Educational Statistics*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Journal of Higher Education*, and *National Report Card on Higher Education*, and *Forum on Public Policy Education*.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In the following section, I expand on the theories that helped ground, guide, and framed this study. Together, Astin's (1977, 1984) theory of student involvement, Bean's (1983) industrial model of student learning, and Tinto's (1993) theory of integration served as the conceptual framework for this study. These theories guided the design of the study and assisted in my interpretation of the results of this study regarding the experiences of the male college student participants.

#### **Astin's Theory of Student Involvement and the Input-Environment-Output Model**

Astin (1977, 1984) theorized that involvement, or the interaction between students and the academic and social systems of their colleges, was necessary for persistence and success in college. Astin (1984) defined student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518), and operationalized involvement as study time spent on campus, engagement in the membership of campus organizations, and interaction with faculty on and off campus.

For Astin (1984), investment of physical and psychosocial energy manifests through interaction with peers and faculty in social interactions as well as academic pursuits, which enhance students' desire to remain in college and is essential to student success. According to Astin (1984), involvement can be experienced in the classroom or in other activities such as those relating to completing assignments, working on class projects, or participating in school activities. Astin (1984) concluded that students' persistence and retention rates are impacted by the level and quality of their interactions with peers, faculty, and staff. In addition, Astin's (1984) contention was that involvement occurs along a continuum; students demonstrate varying levels of commitment to different purposes at different times based on interest. Learning and personal development are related to the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological investment by the student.

Astin (1977, 1984) sought to understand how undergraduate students were affected by their college experiences in the 1970s. Astin was not only concerned with the individual development of students but found it important to study the background characteristics students brought with them to college in relation to student learning and outcomes. Astin conducted extensive research on the impact of college on students' development, and his theory of involvement provided a broad foundation for further research and discussion regarding retention (Stagg & Kimmins, 2014). Astin's theory of involvement facilitated researchers' development of retention models and allowed for theoretical understandings of student persistence and retention factors related to the degree students are integrated into their college environments. Astin's theory of



involvement provided a framework that influenced the construction of institutional policy and research agendas since students bring with them a set of experiences and values to college, the experiences they encounter during college, how they manage those experiences, and what outcomes exist in the student's' development because of these experiences.

Almost 20 years later, Astin (1993) examined how the attributes that affected students in the 1990s had changed. This latter research was a longitudinal study of 20,000 students using data collected by the Higher Education Research Institute and Cooperative Institutional Research Program. Astin (1993) concluded that involvement was still a key component in students' college success. Recent research has confirmed links between involvement using Astin's (1977, 1984) input-environment-output model and student satisfaction, which can lead to increased retention (Strayhorn, 2012). Involvement can represent a path to success for students who are active on campus. Astin's (1977, 1984) theory of involvement also provided a framework to understand better the specific experiences of male college students who have left college.

In the input-environment-output model, Astin (1977, 1984) referred to a set of characteristics students possess before their entry into college, some of which influence their views and perceptions about college. The model has also helped researchers and administrators understand how learning environments can be conducive to student development and success. Researchers have used the model for many years to study college student development and institutional factors contributing to an individual student's development and success under varying environmental conditions. Input refers

to the background characteristics students bring with them to school (e.g., gender, beliefs, and attitudes toward learning; Astin, 1977, 1984). Environment refers to the social influences that shape students' college experiences and the interaction of input and environmental factors influencing student outcomes, such as retention. Astin (1977, 1984) posited that studying student development using the input-environment-output model could help researchers and educators understand how to achieve positive outcomes. Astin (1977, 1984) believed these variables offered a complete understanding of the background factors and characteristics influencing a student's capacity to persist. Astin (1993) used 192 environmental measures in this later study, which included areas related to institutional characteristics, students' peer group characteristics, faculty characteristics, curriculum, financial aid, major, residence, and student involvement.

### **Bean and the Industrial Model of Student Learning**

Like Astin (1977, 1984), Bean (1983) also focused on student learning in relation to the background and social factors. Bean (1983) sought to develop a model of student retention to help connect psychological and background variables to social and academic integration factors to examine student learning and outcomes, such as academic success and student retention. Bean's industrial model of student attrition is patterned after an employee satisfaction model substituting student attrition for dissatisfaction as a variable.

Bean and Metzner (1985) developed a model to understand attrition among nontraditional undergraduate students. Bean and Metzner theorized that an important difference between traditional and nontraditional students regarding attrition was that nontraditional students experienced environmental factors that affected campus

integration in ways that did not affect traditional-age, full-time, residential students. Because nontraditional students are sometimes older, have to commute, and are often considered part-time students who do not take what is classified as a full-load, they have less interaction in the college community with faculty, peers, and campus services, as well as lower participation in extracurricular activities. Conversely, nontraditional students often have a greater experience with external factors that are not related to college than traditional students do (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Environmental factors, which can serve as distractions and impediments to nontraditional students interacting with the larger campus community include financial difficulties, employment hours, lack of outside encouragement, and family responsibilities (Bean & Metzner, 1985). For Bean and Metzner (1985), environmental factors can be related to background variables (age, ethnicity, gender) and defining variables (residence, enrollment status, educational goals). Additionally, environmental factors can influence psychological outcomes that may lead to nontraditional students dropping out of college. These outcomes include dissatisfaction, questioning the utility value of higher education, diminished goal commitment, and stress.

### **Tinto's Theory of Integration**

Tinto's (1993) theory of integration asserts that students enter college with personal and social factors that are related to their interaction with, or their integration into, the campus community, which influences student success and retention. Tinto posited that the level of student integration into an academic community influences whether a student will leave school or remain enrolled.

Tinto (1993) stated that students come to college with their own characteristics that include family background (parental educational level, social status), individual attributes (ability, race, and gender), skill level (intellectual and social), financial resources (or the lack thereof), dispositions (motivations, intellectual, and political preferences), and precollege experiences (e.g., a student's high school record). Tinto claimed these factors are important to first-time college first-year students and may contribute to whether or not students stay in college and persist to the next year or leave college. Individual student characteristics influence a student's initial commitment to the institution, the goal of college graduation, as well as the decision to depart, which in turn affects the student's degree of academic achievement and social integration (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto (1993) evaluated the academic institution as having accountable integration standards based on his theory of integration. Tinto believed these standards set a high bar for higher education institutions. The level of standards developed by Tinto focused attention on values such as behavioral benchmarks, student support, and an academic path leading to success. These standards can support the transition and integration of students into the campus community and interactions with faculty, staff, and other students on campus. Tinto also surmised that within the campus community a positive collaboration and cooperation between the students and institution would lead a student to a college degree.

Tinto (1993) further explained that each of these factors affects the departure decision by indirectly influencing students' intentions and commitments toward their

education. Intention refers to the level and type of education desired by the student, and commitment indicates the dedication to goal attainment as well as institutional loyalty (Ma & Cragg, 2013). Tinto acknowledged that external commitments also alter a student's intentions to persist in college. These commitments can include anything from jobs to the family. Because of these commitments, departure is still a possibility even in situations where the student is succeeding and is having a positive college experience.

In their qualitative study of the success of Black men at a historically Black university, Palmer, Davis, and Maramba (2011) argued for a revision of Tinto's (1993) theory to include considerations of support systems external to the university environment. Palmer et al. discovered through student interviews that families and friends played a crucial role in the success of Black men attending a historically Black university. Consequently, Palmer et al. concluded that future researchers should consider the importance of expanding social integration on campus to include the importance of support systems outside of institutional environments, such as those consisting of family and friends.

### **Tinto and Validation Theory**

Researchers have also studied validation theory in relation to Tinto's (1993) theory of integration and used it as a theoretical framework to guide research in understanding the experiences and success of college students, especially underserved students. Validation theory holds that students are more successful when their experiences and voices are recognized as important and when their personal development and social adjustment are fostered (Rendon, 1994). For example, Barnett (2011)

examined faculty-staff interaction with students as a type of validation (recognizing, respecting, and valuing students) and found it predicted academic integration and persistence in community college experiences. Barnett used validation theory to understand validation not as an alternative to Tinto's theory of integration, but as a precondition for integration. Recommendations from Barnett included increased opportunities for faculty interaction with students and raising awareness among faculty of the importance of their involvement in campus activities and with students. Barnett also recommended that faculty see students as capable and valued learners.

Linares and Munoz (2011) revisited validation theory, reviewing how researchers have used it and sketched future directions for research to advance validation in theory and practice. They argued that an early faculty mentor, for example, who extolls praise for accomplishment can encourage academic success that leads to enhanced student efficacy. Linares and Munoz offered ways to enhance validation theory as it applies to research agendas, theoretical enhancement, and practical dimensions. They concluded that further general research on how to connect validation theory to pedagogical practice was needed as well as on how to use the theory to help define and investigate more inclusive teaching and learning contexts (Linares & Munoz, 2011).

### **Literature Review**

This empirical literature review covers retention in higher education. The topics covered in the literature review are retention in higher education, male student attrition in higher education, African American and Hispanic male college attrition, male attrition and the community college, and human capital and the value of college education.

## **Retention in Higher Education**

GPA and standardized test scores, such as the ACT, are significantly linked to first-year college academic performance, a strong predictor of retention. Westrick, Le, Robbins, Radunzel, and Schmidt (2015) conducted a metaanalytic study of academic performance and persistence, investigating the strength of the relationship between high school grades, ACT composite scores, and socioeconomic status. High school GPA, ACT scores, socioeconomic status, interest-major congruence, and academic performance have all been found to be predictors of timely degree attainment and retention. The dataset for the study was based on a sample of 189,612 students from 50 institutions. Westrick et al. found that high school GPAs and ACT scores were significantly related to academic performance in the first year of college, and that academic performance in the first year was the best predictor of second and third year retention. Socioeconomic status, however, was a poor predictor of retention and academic performance.

The construct of adjustment to college (i.e., how and to what degree students adjust to the demands of college) can also be used to understand persistence and retention (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 2006). Entering college presents students with various new challenges that extend beyond academic demands. Consequently, how well and to what degree students adjust to college life can be relevant to their performance and whether they decide to remain in college or leave. In their metaanalysis, Credé and Niehorster (2012) examined studies in which researchers used the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire. Credé and Niehorster organized their investigation around three themes: (a) the structure of college adjustment, (b) the relationship between college adjustment

and possible correlates, and (c) the relationship between college adjustment and college GPA and retention. Credé and Niehorster found that adjustment to college was a multidimensional construct consisting of academic, social, and personal-emotional adjustment, as well as institutional attachment that was predictive of college grades and retention. Individual-level factors (individual traits) and social factors (social support) were found to have moderate to weak relationships to adjustment to college.

Permzadian and Credé (2016) observed that in higher education, socialization methods commonly involve some form of new student orientation (e. g., presemester orientation sessions, first-year seminars). New student orientation can be important to persistence because such programs help to apprise students of campus resources and help to acclimate students to college life. Additionally, new student orientation can be important to persistence because the highest attrition rate for college students occurs between their first and second years (Permzadian & Credé, 2016). Colleges also focus on academic performance and retention because of fiscal importance; retaining students is more economical than recruiting new students to replace those who have left. In their metaanalytic study of 682 sources, Permzadian and Credé used a rigorous three-pronged coding method and examined the effectiveness of first-year college seminars based on 1-year retention rates. Although the effect of first-year seminars maybe small, Permzadian and Credé found they had only a small positive effect on first-year grades, with a slightly more positive effect on first-year retention rates.



## **Male Student Attrition in Higher Education**

I found several studies showing that a successful student either in higher education or a high school student about to enter higher education is one who has developed a pattern of academic success through persistence, perseverance, and dedication (D'Amico, Dika, Elling, Algozzine, & Ginn, 2014; Dapremont, 2014; Hansen, Truillo, Bolabd, & MacKinnon, 2014). However, distractions and demands on men's time from family, friends, and employment have been found to represent serious challenges to college academic success (D'Amico et al., 2014). The cultural and environmental obstacles men face can challenge the requirements of academic persistence and performance (Hansen et al., 2014). Additional factors include study strategies, the college pipeline, academic preparedness, and experiences related to race. Information from international research also sheds light on the attrition of men from colleges in the United States. These variables affecting male college student retention are analyzed below, including approaches to learning and gender, academic preparedness of first-year students, African American and Hispanic male college attrition, male attrition and the community college, and human capital and the value of college education.

**Approaches to learning and gender.** I found that numerous studies examined strategies regarding gender. For example, Marrs and Sigler (2012) examined the role study strategies and approaches to learning played in male academic college performance, which may relate to men's academic persistence and success at the college level. Marrs and Sigler used a study process questionnaire to measure study skills and the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory to measure learning approaches among three

samples of university and community college students comprised of 376 women and 274 men. Using multivariate analysis, Marrs and Sigler found that the female college students scored significantly higher than male students regarding their approaches to learning (deep approach and achieving approach), motivation, self-testing, the use of study aids, and time management.

Deep learning approaches were associated with the students' engagement with the material, characterized by making connections between previous learning and new learning, which required incorporating new knowledge into previous cognitive schemes (Marrs & Sigler, 2012). Deep learning contrasts with surface learning, typified by learning whatever was required for an exam (Marrs & Sigler, 2012). An achieving approach to learning was demonstrated by the student doing whatever was required for successful academic performance, which may have involved deep or surface approaches or what the learning situation required (Marrs & Sigler, 2012). Marrs and Sigler (2012) recommended further research into how sociocultural factors relate to gender differences in study strategies and learning.

#### **Academic preparedness, first-year academic performance, and gender.**

Researchers have also studied gender differences in college preparedness. For example, Combs et al. (2010) looked at male and female student performance on the SAT and the ACT in their study of gender differences in college preparedness. Combs et al. examined tests from 1,099 public high schools from across the state of Texas to determine the college preparedness percentages by gender and subject. Combs et al. found that 51.1% of female students were prepared for college in reading compared to 38.76% of male

students. However, 52.57% of male students were prepared for college in math, compared to 44.12% of female students. When both subjects were examined, just under a third of both male and female students were prepared for college in these two subjects (30.19% and 32.38%, respectively). The numbers on reading and math break along traditional lines of gender aptitude even though female students were encouraged by counselors toward programs such as science, engineering, and math.

Studies have shown that the pattern of male students leaving college early is a problem in several European countries as well as in the United States. For example, Severiens and ten Dam (2012) observed that in countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, women generally outnumbered men and were more successful in higher education. Severiens and ten Dam, through a review of international research literature, found that gender differences in three crucial areas might explain male college student attrition and female college student success: learner characteristics, external factors, and institutional factors. Women in the Netherlands were found to score higher in learner characteristics than men, especially in noncognitive learning characteristics such as motivation, discipline, goal setting, and time management skills (Severiens & ten Dam, 2012).

External factors may also contribute to gender differences regarding retention and persistence at the college level. For example, more jobs may be available to men that do not require higher education, and men generally have a higher earning potential than women (Severiens & ten Dam, 2012). This may serve as an incentive for men to leave higher education early or not to enter it at all (Severiens & ten Dam, 2012). In addition,

institutional factors may play an important role in men's early departure from higher education. Severiens and ten Dam (2012) pointed to research that showed that men might feel less connected to the college community than their female counterparts. Severiens and ten Dam also found that male college students were less satisfied with their non-classroom interactions and mentoring experiences with faculty than their female counterparts.

I found researchers have argued that studies that focus on 4-year completion and enrollment are too narrow and only tell part of the story of male college student retention. For example, Carbonaro, Ellison, and Covay (2011) used the metaphor of "the pipeline" (p. 120) to characterize college students' journey toward graduation. Carbonari et al. examined 4-year degree attainment and gender inequity in a series of institutional stages (on-time entry, delayed entry, and 2 to 4-year transfer) using National Education Longitudinal Studies data from 1988 to 2000. In their development of a pipeline framework, they analyzed and compared different pathways that students took in attaining a 4-year college degree. Carbonaro et al. found that female students held an advantage over male students in 4-year degree attainment as well as in almost every stage of the process in the pipeline to earning a degree. Additionally, female students were more likely than male students to attend a 2-year college than a 4-year college. The students who experienced the greatest advantage towards graduation were female students who transitioned from high school on time to 4-year colleges (Carbonaro et al., 2011). Carbonaro et al. also found that women who delayed entering the college pipeline fared slightly worse than men in attaining a 4-year degree.

In their study of the motivation, ability, and retention in 584 college first-year students at a Midwestern university, Alarcon and Edwards (2012) found that gender and ACT scores were significant predictors of college student retention. Alarcon and Edwards collected data at four points corresponding with the four quarters of the school year with enrollment in the first quarter required for participation. Alarcon and Edwards found that female students were 1.59 times more likely to leave college than male students. This finding does not support those in the Carbonaro et al. (2011) study, possibly because the timeframe for Alarcon and Edwards's research was the first four quarters of the school year and not over a longer period. Carbonaro et al. used data that spanned four school years. In their study of a unique dataset involving 1,800 students from a state college system, DeNicco et al. (2015) found that freshman year GPA, along with credits earned during that year, were significant predictors of freshman year retention for both men and women.

### **African American and Hispanic Male College Attrition**

The sociodemographic characteristics of African American and Hispanic students who left college have been a matter of discussion for several years. In my findings, research on underserved male populations helped inform this study regarding college experiences of men in general. Harper and Davis (2012), in a content analysis of application essays, found several areas that contributed to the academic underperformance of African American male college students including the perception that attending school was unworthy of their time, the accusation is made that they were acting like "White people" (p. 106) in classes or on campus, and resistance to the

educational structure. In a study of African American men at 2-year community colleges, Strayhorn (2012b) found a statistically significant link between social integration and satisfaction, with satisfaction being a strong correlate of student retention. Strayhorn sampled 127 African American male community college students using the 191-item Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire. Strayhorn found that social integration and family responsibility were the factors most strongly related to satisfaction with college for African American men at community colleges. Strayhorn's findings concerning responsibility to family partially refute those of Richardson, Abraham, and Bond (2012) who found that family responsibilities were factors that affected why African American men left college early. Grades were marginally linked to satisfaction with college in this population. Strayhorn concluded that the retention of African American men in higher education was a multifaceted issue, and that more work on the satisfaction of African American men with college experiences is needed.

Wood (2012) examined the reasons for Black men leaving public 2-year colleges using data from two waves (2003-2004 and 2005-2006) of the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study. Examining data from the two waves allowed Wood to generate insight into reasons for leaving college across 1 to 3 years. Wood analyzed data using logistic regression and found that Black men in the 2003-2004 sample were more likely to leave college because of family responsibilities than those in the 2005-2006 sample, suggesting that if Black men leave college because of family responsibilities, they will do so early. Additionally, Wood found that Black men reported higher departure

rates than other college men (White, Hispanic, Asian), indicating that sociodemographic variables were important to college male persistence and retention.

Research on college success and persistence among African American men has also included the study of success factors in relation to White men at community colleges (Perrakis, 2008), the role of supportive relationships (Strayhorn, 2008b), generating success in ethnic minorities (Museus, 2014), and the role of student support organizations (Simmons, 2013). In a quantitative study of 4,333 students, Perrakis (2008) sought to identify the factors associated with academic success (i.e., course completion and GPA) among African American and White men in nine community colleges in Los Angeles. Perrakis found no racial differences in the student outcomes, suggesting an unexpected homogeneity in the associated variables among the men of different racial groups on these campuses. Academic preparation was the most significant factor related to academic success in both African American and White male students, which confirmed the importance of preparation for academic success found in earlier studies (Porchea, Allen, Robbins, & Phelps, 2010; Robbins et al., 2004). Perrakis suggested campus workshops and activities to develop academic skills that target male students.

In another quantitative study, Strayhorn (2008b) examined the connection between supportive relationships, academic achievement, and satisfaction with the college of 231 African American male college students. Supportive relationships referred to frequent, positive interaction with socializing agents on campus, including faculty, staff, and peers. Strayhorn (2008b) found that supportive relationships were related to higher levels of satisfaction with college, which he confirmed in a later study (Strayhorn

2012a), but not with academic achievement as measured by GPA. Strayhorn's findings confirmed theoretical arguments that interaction, integration, and support are crucial for the success of African American males in college (Tinto, 1993), which may include students feeling satisfied with their college experiences. Furthermore, Strayhorn (2008b) extrapolated practical ways to leverage supportive relationships to increase the college satisfaction of African American men, potentially leading to increased success and retention rates. Strayhorn (2008b) recommended the increased use of Summerbridge and precollege programs to develop, maintain, and strengthen supportive relationships with important socializing agents on campus.

Using U.S. Department of Education data from 2002, Flowers (2006) investigated African American male students' academic and social integration experiences in the first year of college in 2-year and 4-year institutions. Flowers found that African American males attending 4-year institutions were more likely to report higher levels of academic and social integration in the first year of college than those at community colleges. Flowers interpreted these findings using Tinto's (1993) theory of integration that holds that social and academic integration experiences are crucial to students' college success and persistence. Generally, 4-year institutions may be able to offer more support services for students, specifically African American males, than 2-year institutions. Flowers concluded that it was necessary for 2-year institutions to develop and implement more support services for African American males, especially services for first-year students, to help enhance social and academic integration experiences of this student group.



In my research on minority student success, I included research from several articles claiming success factors that contribute to minority student achievement at 4-year, predominantly White institutions (PWIs). For example, Museus (2014) conducted a case study to identify and analyze institutional factors that contributed to the success of minority students at three 4-year high-performing PWIs. From the analysis of interviews with 65 students, faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as a review of relevant institutional documents, four themes emerged regarding the institutional success factors of minority students. These themes included strong networking values, humanizing the educational experience, institutional responsibility for students, and targeted support. Networking included high levels of communication and collaboration, as well as both formal and informal networking activities (Museus, 2014). Humanizing the educational experience for minority students meant that educators and administrators took the time to cultivate meaningful relationships with students and went about their work with care and commitment. The institutions in the study also displayed a commitment to supporting minority students, including the dedication of resources and the availability of key administrators and staff to guide and counsel minority students (Museus, 2014).

I included research focusing on the role of student support organizations in the persistence of African American men in college. For example, Simmons (2013) conducted a case study, which included student interviews, of Project Empowerment (a student support organization for improving African American male retention at a PWI to identify factors contributing to the persistence of African American male students involved in the program. Four themes emerged from the interviews that were important to

persistence: (a) preparedness for college, (b) high expectations, (c) the importance of social relationships and connections, and (d) student involvement with the organization. The importance of preparation for college supports Perrakis's (2008) findings that academic preparation was one of the most important factors related to academic success for African American male students. Also, Simmons's findings also support Hughes's (2010) argument for anticipatory advising and the role of holding high expectations for African American male students to meet anticipated challenges and succeed academically. Support organizations can help to prepare students for college work, and thereby help them to meet expectations. Support organizations also represent places where students can forge and maintain social relationships and gain a sense of involvement with campus culture. The importance of social relationships and connections as well as student involvement with support organizations align with Tinto's (1993) theory of integration. Simmons concluded that African American male students could benefit from support organizations if students remained involved with the organizations.

### **Male Attrition and Community College**

I focused on using Tinto's (1993) theory of integration to study attrition and retention at the community college level. Community college students are often nontraditional students compared to those attending 4-year colleges. Community college students may face the additional challenges of integrating into the academic culture if they are nontraditional students who have more responsibilities to family and work than do students at 4-year universities (Santos-George, 2012) and because of other sociocultural factors, such as barriers associated with race (Bennett, 2014). In a study of

community college students, Santos-George (2012) tested Tinto's integrative framework using structural equation modeling to analyze a national sample of 2,847 community college students. Santos-George found that Tinto's theory was partially supported and that only after-entry goals were significantly related to academic and social integration.

Some community college students' educational goals include seeking additional workplace skills that will position them in higher rankings in an organization and increase their income levels (Linares & Munoz, 2011; Simmons, 2013). Many students attend community colleges because of a lack of skillsets or the finances to attend 4-year traditional colleges or universities (or attend community college while they are preparing to do so), while others enroll to upgrade their skills in the marketplace (Ingram & Gonzalez-Matthews, 2013). Nontraditional students may require more systematic support and interventions geared towards underserved populations and engaging this subgroup may require different approaches than those used for traditional students to facilitate their persistence from term-to-term or year-to-year (Simmons, 2013).

Off-campus experiences have been found to lead to attrition as well. For example, in their narrative study, Ingram and Gonzalez-Matthews (2013) collected and analyzed the personal and academic experiences of 12 Latino male undergraduate students at a Mid-Atlantic urban community college. The researchers found that these men encountered off-campus circumstances that impeded their engagement with campus culture. These circumstances included the influence of peers who did not attend college, family commitments, and employment. Ingram and Gonzalez-Matthews's findings partially conflicted with those of Strayhorn (2012a), which indicated that family

responsibility was related to satisfaction with college. Ingram and Gonzalez-Matthews recommended that college commitment to engaging Latino male students be informed by off-campus factors that influence on-campus engagement to better help these students persist.

In a study set in three rural community colleges in Alabama, Moore (2012) found that African American students who were engaged and involved in college academic and social life were more likely to reach their educational goals, which included increased retention and decreased rates of departure. Important areas for student involvement included faculty interaction, library activities, and participation in on-campus clubs and organizations. Other areas of student involvement included participation in counseling and career planning. In a single case study of an African American residential community at a PWI, Bennett (2014) found four themes based on academic and social integration: persistence through involvement, belonging through university connectivity, personal development, and the importance of addressing issues related to transitioning from high school to college.

### **Human Capital and the Value of College Education**

In my research, I studied the various articles centering on the movement patterns and enrollment cycles in relationship to college students, employment, and human capital. Hillman and Orians (2013) studied enrollment cycles in community colleges and unemployment rates using national data (1999-2009) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Bureau of Economic Analysis, and the U.S. Department of Education Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data Systems. Hillman and Orians found that enrollment

demand at community colleges ran counter to fluctuations in labor and economic markets and that enrollment increased in weak economic cycles. Using economic theory, Hillman and Orians concluded that in times of economic decline people are likely to invest in human capital, such as higher education, in hopes of making themselves more marketable in increasingly competitive labor markets. However, Hillman and Orians did not provide analysis of enrollment cycles as they related to gender and recommended further research on enrollment demand with factors such as gender, race, and age.

In a study regarding the patterns of students moving from high school to college, Faggian and Franklin (2014) also used Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data Systems information and found that student quality, based on the institutional variables of test scores and grades, was a key determinant of high school to college migration. Students of high quality were more interested in the types of colleges they wanted to attend and less interested in college locations. Low-quality students tended to weigh various factors (e.g., institution type, institution location) equally. Faggian and Franklin pointed out that the migration patterns of students from high school to college may have implications for college retention. Colleges that can attract high quality students may increase their retention rates; however, like Hillman and Orians (2013), Faggian and Franklin did not analyze data in relation to gender.

Working with human capital theory, Stuart, Rios-Aguilar, and Deil-Amen (2014) sought to develop a model of student retention in which they revised Tinto's (1993) theory of integration by adding job market and family-work-school concerns. Human capital models allow researchers to focus on monetary and economic factors when

investigating students' decisions to persist or leave college. Observing the importance of socioacademic integration to student retention, Stuart et al. argued that the missing piece in fully understanding students' decisions to remain or leave college was how labor market concerns influenced students' decisions to persist. Stuart et al. used the National Center for Education Statistics data on community college students and data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and found that it supported their alternative, integrative model. The structure of labor markets and concerns of employability influenced community college students' decisions to stay in college, although gender did not factor into their analysis.

Harris and King (2015), also working with human capital theory, examined 100 community college students' perceptions of the importance of 10 employability skills and competence in their ability to perform these skills. Students who participated in the study attended a community college in rural Mississippi and were of two groups: those in academic programs and those in career-technical programs. Employability skills included written communication skills, verbal communication skills, interpersonal skills, critical thinking skills, supervisory skills, customer service skills, project management skills, problem-solving skills, and teamwork skills. Harris and King found that both groups realized the importance of all the employability skills, although there were differences in how each group ranked their importance. In this study, employable skills such as career-technical programs are not available at this community college. The career-technical programs are just starting on a limited basis. Therefore, the discussion of employable skills at this college are academic programs leading to satisfying the core requirements.

The relevance of Harris and King's study was that community colleges delivering employability skills that students find important could help attract and perhaps retain students in their quest for obtaining human capital.

### **Summary**

I reviewed the retention and attrition literature by noted researchers indicating that Astin's (1977) theory of involvement, Bean's (1983) industrial model of student learning, and Tinto's (1993) theory of integration remain useful for understanding issues of student retention and attrition in higher education. These theories are also appropriate for helping to understand the college experiences of young men who have left college in their first or second year because social, environmental, institutional, and psychological factors continue to influence why students decide to leave college (Ingram & Gonzalez-Matthews, 2013; Luke, Redekop, & Burgin, 2015).

Astin (1993) found that studying student characteristics and their academic background, including involvement, may lead to supportable learning and eventually positive outcomes. Bean (1983) also focused on the student learning through background and social factors. Bean compared the industrial world to the academic world to understand the satisfaction of workers and students, including nontraditional and traditional students. Tinto's (1993) theory of integration stated the importance the experiences of those students entering college both socially and academically. Integration is the interaction environment students experience as they transition into the academic community of higher education.

In the empirical literature review, I analyzed studies pertaining to academic preparedness, first-year academic performance, and gender. I also discussed retention, and attrition studies concerning males, particularly African American and Hispanic males as well as retention studies that focused on men in community colleges. Finally, I reviewed research regarding human capital and the value of a college education.

Chapter 3 contains a discussion of the design and rationale, population and sampling, and data collection procedures for this study. A description of data analysis procedures and a discussion of trustworthiness, including issues of transferability, dependability, and credibility, are also included in Chapter 3.



### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the common perceptions among former male college students who left a community college in the Southcentral United States after their first or second year. The use of a generic qualitative method allowed for the open-ended exploration of experiences and perceptions among these men to understand the reasons for their attrition. This chapter includes information regarding the research design and rationale for this study as well as the participant selection logic and sampling plan. I discuss data collection and a procedure for the analysis of interview data. I also address issues of trustworthiness and the ethical procedures used to protect the participants.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do men describe their experiences leading to the decision to discontinue their community college education?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What supports do men perceive colleges could offer to support their decision to continue postsecondary education?

The central focus of this study was male students' college experience and the perceptions of their experience regarding their reasons for departing college. In examining this topic, challenges and supports were the primary focus, with emphasis on those described as contributing to the students' eventual departure from the school. I examined all experiences and perceptions common to this sample to explore the full extent of this topic. Commonalities contributing to an underlying essence of the experience may expand the body of knowledge regarding attrition among male students.

The research design for this study was qualitative to elicit the students' perceptions and experiences regarding postsecondary male college student attrition.

### **Rationale for the Design**

I selected a qualitative method for this study for several reasons. Qualitative data are interpretative, experiential, situational, and personalistic (Stake, 2010). Qualitative data are interpretive in that findings are subjective, and multiple perspectives can be presented; therefore, the researcher must keep an open mind to all experiences and unexpected occurrences. Qualitative data are experiential because the data are empirical, and findings are developed directly from the experiences of others. It can also be viewed as situational because different experiences may occur based on place and time. This uniqueness cannot typically be supported by generalizations as found in quantitative research. Finally, qualitative data can be personalistic because the data contributes to a comprehensive explanation of multiple perceptions while still examining the diversities inherent to a situational experience (Stake, 2010). Using the qualitative methodology allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the rationale for departing male college students and also clarified forces for withdrawal from college.

I considered the quantitative and mixed methods approaches but rejected these based on their inadequacy for this exploratory study. In the quantitative design and the quantitative aspect of a mixed-method design, specific variables must be identified and targeted for measurement and subsequent hypothesis testing (Stevens, 2009).

Quantitative methods were insufficient because I intended to explore the shared perspectives among a population of men who discontinued their postsecondary education

within the first 2–3 years with no preidentified variables. It was possible that a sequential mixed-method approach could have been used with qualitative identification of possible contributing factors to the students' choice to leave postsecondary education and a subsequent test of these variables. However, it was not certain that the qualitative assessment of the population's experiences would result in variables that could then be measured quantitatively.

### **Generic Qualitative Design**

I used a qualitative design with a generic research approach. In generic or basic qualitative research, the researcher explores perceptions and experiences regarding a given phenomenon and attempts to reduce them to a narrative for a better understanding and explanation of the population's perspective (Patton, 2002). Considering the various qualitative approaches suggested by Creswell (2007), Maxwell (2005), and Patton (2002), I determined that a generic or basic qualitative method would give the male college student a voice that allowed him to express the experiences he felt in college, inviting him to openly discuss what issues of concern and satisfaction he experiences in a holistic perspective or inquiry. This method gained substantial data which corroborated what much of the research previously found and allowed what this little understood topic allowed to be assessed regarding the how and why. I focused on the interview questions and probes resulting in a better understanding of the increasing rates of attrition among men in postsecondary school.

Generic or basic qualitative research does not represent a specific methodology; instead, it is instead a broad type of approach (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2002). This

breadth lends generic qualitative research the ability to provide wide-ranging exploratory findings when there is little knowledge of what to expect from analysis because several different procedures can be used to arrive at the results (Merriam, 2002).

Merriam (2002) described several different procedures for use within this framework, and I determined an interpretive approach was deemed most appropriate. This approach allowed me to measure a general assessment of how male students interacted with their social world to decide to leave the community college before completing their programs or degrees. The interpretive analysis of the men in this study focused on the reality of how they made the decision to leave the higher education system. The experiences the male students shared fell within this focus. Merriam determined, "In conducting a basic [generic] qualitative study, you seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved, or a combination of these" (p. 6). The goal of the generic design is to get as much information from fewer participants than a larger survey.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as researcher was as an unbiased observer in the qualitative tradition, following data collection procedures and themes. The rich tradition of qualitative research emphasizes quality. As I moved through the rich tradition of qualitative research, I determined to find out through qualitative inquiry by focusing on the values of the individuals who participate and the validity of their interview responses. Focusing on the meaning of the perceptions held by the individual and the nuance of the relationship

of those perceptions held by others is related to the search for understanding and essence through the interview process.

I brought an objective perspective to this study because my own student career in higher education had times of delay throughout my many years of classroom attendance. Because of this relationship with the topic, I actively maintained an objective perspective. I engaged in bracketing, or epoché, which Chan, Fung, and Chien (2013) mentioned as an important aspect of all qualitative research. According to Chan et al. (2013), the researcher should identify and take note of all preexisting biases and constantly consider them when interviewing and interpreting the results.

As a PhD candidate and a higher education instructor, I was obligated to maintain an arms-length relationship with the participants, particularly because I assembled them from my home campus. However, the selection process discounted those individuals who knew me or participated in any of my classes so that power differentials did not interfere with the ethical integrity of this study. I did not exclude participants based on race, ethnicity, religion, or economic factors.

The participants were properly informed of all study procedures before their agreement to participate using an informed consent form and through discussion prior to interviewing. The participants were sent transcripts of the interviews and asked to confirm their accuracy, or if necessary, they had the option to exclude themselves from the study. I set aside my past experiences and biases as much as possible to examine the experiences of the participants from a fresh perspective.

## **Methodology**

This section includes explanations of population and sampling, instrumentation, and the data collection procedures. I prepared the data analysis procedures using the interview data by delineating and measuring for content so that the study's methodological details are clear.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The population for this study were male college students who left a community college in the Southcentral United States in the first 2–3 years of enrollment and did not return. The former postsecondary students came from a community college in the Southcentral United States and included male college students who intended to complete 2 years of study and transfer to a 4-year institution, but who left college within the first 2–3 years of their start dates. The selection process may or may not have participants that have similar experiences and knowledge of each other; therefore, a wide and varied range of responses will illuminate their experiences. Because all the participants had left the institution, the possibility that they had similar experiences was an advantage in this research.

I did not include in my sampling any male college student below the age of 18, and I did not include any of my former students. Students who were less than fluent in English could participate, but my research did not include selecting individuals based on that demographic or any other than attrition and age. Because I am not bilingual, I preferred the participants to have a fairly expressive grasp of the English language. A participant pool of eight male college students who attended a community college in the

Southcentral United States was the sample size goal, and I interviewed eight participants. These participants did not leave college more than 1–2 years after their enrollment since a longer gap might have eroded their recall of their campus and academic experiences, making faded memories and their dialogue unreliable. They experienced the beginning of the education process but for various reasons did not earn a degree.

The students, as a purposeful sampling population, completed less than 1 year of study or more than 1 year with a maximum 3-year limit as a college enrollee. This population, therefore, consisted of male college students ages 18–25 regardless of any alignment with a group, race, religion, degree program, or other affiliation. Annual reports from the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (2015) described the population of 2-year and 4-year college students from community colleges in the South. The data indicated that 73.7% of women continued their education past the first year, while only 68.0% of men retained past Year 1. Of the men in these community colleges, 61% successfully graduated from 4-year universities, and 59.4% of those who began at 2-year colleges became graduates. Conversely, 69.5% of women in 4-year colleges continued to graduation, while 65.9% of women enrolled in 2-year colleges became graduates (Arkansas Department of Higher Education, 2015).

### **Instrumentation**

I developed a set of 10 interview questions (Appendix A) with follow-up questions. The questions were reviewed by my committee to increase their trustworthiness. I held one mock interview with an individual who was not a potential participant to determine if the interview questions were easily understood and that they

elicited useful information. This process resulted in further honing of the interview questions, which increased the validity of the instrument. I also maintained field notes that contained my immediate reflections and observational notes. Information from these notes helped describe occurrences during the interview that the transcript alone could not. The body movements and facial expressions elicited some value to the interview. Some of the participants were nervous and fidgeted a bit before they became comfortable telling their experiences. Some held their head down and played with their hands while speaking.

I designed the interviews to last 45–60 minutes and accommodated additional comments provided by the interviewee beyond the interview questions. A neutral location in a quiet and secure setting was the goal where the participant and I could focus on their experiences and statements important to the study. A face-to-face interview with the participant provided a closer level of confidence.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

I arranged with the college registrar for contact and notification of male students who left the school and formulated written security and confidentiality agreements for them to participate in this study. The vice president of student affairs at the institution agreed to allow me access to the contact information of the male students who were no longer on campus and provided a release notice relieving the institution of any liability signed by the student and me.

I randomly selected eight former students from the list of names provided to me by the college. Those students who did not respond or expressed a lack of interest in the



research were eliminated from the list of potential candidates and released from any future notification. I then returned to the original list and selected additional names to meet my goal of eight to 10 participants. The selective nature of the purposeful sampling forced me to rely on those individuals who wished to take part in the study, who openly contributed valuable information regarding their experiences of being in college, and who allowed a release of that information as part of this study. The possibility that several of the male college students would not agree to participate did not occur; therefore, the participant pool did not fall below the eight to 10 students originally anticipated. The interview protocol began with the procedures of how I would conduct the interview. I asked the research questions in order, leaving enough time for participant responses and additional time for follow-up comments.

The setting was critical for the participants' ease and relaxation. The interview setting was in a library conference room so that it was neutral and free of interruption. I set up a recording device in an unthreatening area to document the conversation and capture the inflection of the participants' voices. The recording device was part of the interview process, and before each interview, I presented the participants with the informed consent form.

The participants received a transcript of their interview before my analysis of the data for any corrections or errors they observed and had the opportunity to approve or disapprove the document. The participants could challenge the content of the document, and the changes became part of the permanent interview record.

Included in the participant acknowledgment was a letter from the vice president of student services inviting the students to be a part of the research study. I outlined the study format in a separate letter and discussed the requirements for participation. The requirements for participation were that the student was male, 18–25 years of age, did not earn a college degree or certificate in the past 2–3 years, and was not a student in any of my classes during this period. The participant also had to be able to express his experiences as a male student, be available for 45–60 minutes to respond to the questions, sign the consent form, and approve and sign all documentation protecting him as a member of the study. I submitted audio recordings for transcription to a third party. As with any others who had access to the data, the third-party transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

I used the data analysis software, NVivo, a qualitative research tool used in managing, analyzing, and storing data, assisted in coding and segmenting data into sequential themes. NVivo was designed to assess the collected qualitative data and as an analytical tool. This software assisted in the data analysis for this research project by illuminating selective coding, categorical processes, and storage of data. Interpretation and evaluation of data were an important feature of this program as well as its search features, which I accessed with as few steps as necessary for retrieval of information. The input data came from participant interview responses.

Based on the data, I created an annotation of keywords and phrases from each interview transcript (Patton, 2002). The open coding process resulted in several codes,

with each paragraph had as few as one code, or several, depending on the richness of data. I classified these open codes into overarching categories, which I reduced to a manageable number of categories since the interviewees made similar statements. After I assessed the open codes for similar or contrasting meaning, I organized them into a consistent number of categories or themes, which focused the codes into a limited number of categories or themes based on similar meanings. In this process, similar categories became subcategories or combined into broader categories depending on the nature and amount of detail.

After the categories were sufficiently combined, I assigned a label to each, which helped define the final theme that each category or sets of categories became. The coding process led to a pattern and determined if each coded experience had relevance to the research question. I assessed irrelevant categories for their application to the research questions and removed them before continuing with the analysis. I established a pseudonym for each participant, which used when I referenced the participant in the presentation of the resulting themes.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

The design of this study followed the guidelines of qualitative methodology regarding participant credibility, validity, reliability, and confirmability. Developing a strategy for incorporating male former college student respondents into the research of male attrition exploring the central phenomenon for meaning and context in the interviews and leading toward the contextual meaning of credibility, validity, transferability, and confirmability.

**Credibility**

The credibility (internal validity) of these male college student participants was important to this study. The participants supported the research, and any deficiency in the responses could have defeated the quest for credibility. The instrument for credibility is the researcher. My background as a college instructor has helped me assess whether a person is open and trustworthy in their responses. Internal validity strategies included triangulation and transcript review. Qualitative methodology creates several approaches to test credibility and of these tests is the concept of triangulation. Triangulation pulls together key phrases from the participants, the value of the data as assessed by the researcher, and how the answers are formulated through observation. Transcript review involved the participants having an opportunity to review their responses and validate that what they said at the time represented their true feelings. The peer review portion included the dissertation committee and an assessment of the interview questions.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which findings apply to others who have experienced the same or similar phenomena (Patton, 2002). External validity is transferable in the form of extrapolation of useful information for the present and future. Male attrition research has an interpretive framework that addresses a problematic condition facing postsecondary institutions. The participants in this research expressed similar experiences provided insight into why some male college students do not complete their academic careers.

**Dependability**

Dependability involves the strategies for maintaining consistent data analysis where participants are asked to provide relevant experiences. This can be accomplished by establishing accountability procedures, formulating a research trail, and taking the participant's words and actions into the components of qualitative methodology. These components of qualitative analysis allow the researcher to seek out common phrases, themes, words, and verbal sequences that can be measured for quantity of value (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Examining first and second semester male college students who left higher education after a 2–3 year enrollment for other experiences revealed a common thought process, perception, or experience and that was common in these individuals.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability originates in the experiences of the male college students and the inductive responses they expressed about their time in higher education institutions. The authenticity of the statements through triangulation and contextual analysis of themes develops a methodological strategy to improve confirmability. The essence is the researcher's contribution to the analysis bringing forth a textual and structural interpretation, and the ability for future researchers to confirm the findings in different populations (i.e., based on different geographic or scholarly settings). It is this framework of detail and inductive analysis that paves the way for new theoretical views on male college student attrition in postsecondary education. Ultimately, the research indicated a pattern of perceptions and experiences common to male college students who prematurely departed from postsecondary education regarding retention and attrition

themes. The authenticity of the participant responses was judged by the interpretative nature of the data analysis. Based on the study parameters, the concluding responses of the male college students to their academic experiences, and the data derived from those responses, information was obtained that could help focus on better academic experiences leading to increased retention rates in postsecondary institutions.

### **Ethical Procedures**

A written consent document aligning the procedures and the participants' rights to their responses was available for their signatures and therefore validated their consent to participate. I assured the participants that the statements they made would be held in strictest confidence and the final storage of the study documentation only accessed by me. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the application for study on May 25, 2017. The approval number is 05-25-17-0173026. As to the validity of the interviewees' statements, I used triangulation to maintain consistent answers to questions asked. Triangulation consisted of comparing the participant responses for similar answers to the interview questions. When any of the participants responded to similar experiences, I considered that response as validity of the study. I did not have any bias toward the participants' answers and fairly assessed their responses.

The participants had the option to choose, at any point, to decline to be part of the study and have their comments voided or redacted from the record. The participants could request time to decide if they wished to be part of the study, and if they chose not to take part during a particular timeframe, they could continue or be released from the obligation.

By signing the consent forms, the participants agreed that their comments would be analyzed and therefore agree to be part of the study. The consent form contained the background of the study, procedures, the nature of the study and its risks and benefits, privacy and contact information, and the interview questions. The time frames of consent and statement of consent were signed and dated by both the participant and me at the time of the interview.

Potential risks and concerns from the study were limited because the individual's identity was kept confidential, and the participants quoted had pseudonyms with no other forms of identification shared. I assured the individuals who took part in the interview process that procedures would be in place to protect their identities and responses. The audio tapes as well as notes based on my observations were secure and kept in my home computer and password protected. I kept all names and personal information in the same location. All data will be preserved for 5 years and then destroyed.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I described the research design, methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures for this research study. I will conduct an assessment value of the data leading to a conclusion understanding the experiences of male college students who decided to leave college before obtaining a degree. The design was a qualitative interpretive analysis with a goal of interviewing 8-10 male college students from a Southcentral U.S. community college.

The central subject of this generic qualitative study was men in higher education who departed from a 2-year postsecondary educational institution before earning a

degree. The research tradition of qualitative methodology leads to the central research question of the perspectives of male college students departing in the first or second year of higher education and the rationale for this departure.

Commencing with dialogue on exclusively male college student attrition does not conclude the discussion. The attrition discussion is a starting point, in the long, downward trend of male college students leaving higher education. This trend is projected to continue. The downward trend of male enrollment in higher education, and the study presented here in this dissertation, have revealed male college students are concerned about their education and future.



## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of men who dropped out of a Southcentral U.S. community college in their second or third year. Two research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do men describe their experiences leading to the decision to discontinue their community college education?

RQ 2: What supports do men perceive colleges could offer to support their decision to continue postsecondary education?

In this chapter, I present the results of this study as they relate to the research questions. This begins with an overview of the participant demographics and data collection process. Then, I discuss the data analysis process. Finally, I present the study results by the five themes that emerged from the data: a feeling of not belonging, financial concerns, challenging timeframes in college life, personal demands and challenges, and desire for campus supports. I also discuss the trustworthiness of the data.

### **Setting**

The campus on which I completed the interviews was a community college located in the Southcentral region of the United States. It has under 10,000 students with an enrollment of students with differing demographics including racial diversity, economic availability, family educational levels, and a gender ratio of about 60% women and 40% men. The campus was offering new programs for vocational, technical, and other hands-on job opportunities. The setting in which I conducted the interviews was the community college library. I reserved a private room in the library for 1–2-hour sessions

where I could interview the *participants* privately and without inference. I checked out a library audio recording device to use with an audio chip that I purchased. I used that device to record all interviews.

### **Demographics**

Participants in this study included eight men who had all left college within their first or second year of school. The participants were between 18–25 years old. Six of the men whom I interviewed were White, and two identified as mixed-race. One of the mixed-race men identified as both Hispanic and Black. The other identified as both Black and White, but he also thought he might be of partial Middle Eastern descent. All participants lived in or moved to the community college area when they were younger and attended the community college after high school.

*Table 1*

*Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Race/Ethnicity	Years in College Before Leaving
Sam	White	2.5
Nick	White	1
Jon	White	2
Andy	White/Hispanic/Middle Eastern	1
Austin	White	1
Cal	Black/White	1.5
Aaron	White	2.5
Matt	White	1

Some of the participants left after attending for 1 year and some of the participants attended from 1 year to 2.5 years.

### **Data Collection**

I collected the data over a 3-month period that ended in mid-December 2017. I interviewed eight men who left college at some point during the past 2–3 years. The interview dates and times varied based on the participants' and my own schedules. The interviews, including briefing the participants and reading the consent form, took from 38 to 58 minutes to complete using an audio device to record the interviews. I followed the interview protocol (Appendix A) and used probing questions as necessary to glean more information from participants. Ten to 15 male participants were initially reasoned to be a sufficient sampling. This number was reduced to eight to 10, factoring in that the qualitative generic research design considers a lower number to be a reasonable for sampling. In the process of finding willing male participants, it took 3 months to complete the interviews. In some cases, the participants were not readily available; therefore, I had to wait for them to make time for the interview. I used email, media flyers, newspaper ads, and snowballing with colleagues as sources to find participants. After the interview, the participants were offered a copy of the interview transcript to review but all declined.

### **Data Analysis**

I began data analysis by open coding. I used NVivo 11, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to do this. NVivo 11 does not analyze the

data for researchers; instead, the program's usefulness lies in its ability to facilitate the coding process and organize data. First, I read through all interview transcripts for overall meaning and context. Then, I began highlighting passages of the first transcript that related to the research questions. These highlighted passages became codes, which were stored as nodes in NVivo, and I gave each of them a short, descriptive name. I repeated this process for all transcripts. As indicated in Chapter 3, triangulation was used to compare similar responses as part of the coding process. The codes were generated considering the statements of the participants where the participants felt strongly about the issues and experiences as they were the enrollees on campus. It was the experiences and perceptions of participants that led to defining how they felt about college and these experiences and perceptions were the reason they left college. Their feelings about their situation were expressed in the interviews.

After completing the open coding process, I examined all codes for similarities and differences. I placed codes that shared similar sentiments into subthemes and gave each subtheme a descriptive name. Then, I examined the similarities and differences between subthemes, combining them into broader groupings based on similarity as necessary. I gave the groups of subthemes another descriptive title, which became the theme. When I finished this process, I re-examined the codes against their parent groupings, moving the codes between subthemes and groupings if there was a better fit elsewhere. I removed all codes that were no longer adequate in terms of total representation of what participants said. The themes I identified that are related to RQ1 were *a feeling of not belonging, financial concerns, challenging timeframes in college*

*life, and personal demands and challenges.* The one theme related to RQ2 was *desire for campus supports.* The subthemes I identified for the theme of a feeling of not belonging were *disappointing experiences with faculty and administration* and *feeling discrimination and alienation.* The subthemes for financial concerns were *financial insecurity, loss of financial aid, and ineligible for financial aid.* The subthemes for challenging timeframes in college life were *lack of free time, too much free time, and time management problems.* Subthemes for personal demands and challenges were *mental health challenges, family obligations, and personal relationships* and finally subthemes for desired campus supports were *administrator availability, lack of supports, and advisors were not helpful.* The thematic structure is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Thematic Structure*

Theme	Subtheme	Codes
1. A feeling of not belonging	Disappointing experiences with faculty and administration	Complicated registration process; did not receive help needed; adviser could have helped more; faculty were too busy.
	Feeling discrimination or alienation	Felt like he wasn't as smart as other students; felt favoritism toward better students; general feeling of alienation
2. Financial concerns	Financial insecurity	Couldn't cover bills and tuition; couldn't afford full tuition cost; financial aid disbursement irregular
	Loss of financial aid Ineligible for financial aid	Used all Pell Grant; lost scholarship  Did not want loan debt; ineligible for GI bill; denied a disability-based scholarship
3. Challenging timeframes in college life	Lack of free time	Had no free time; could not manage limited free time
	Too much free time	Too much extra time led to distractions; too much freedom that he did not use properly
	Time management problems	Lacked motivation; lacked discipline; was unorganized; no discipline to manage time
4. Personal demands and challenges	Mental health challenges	Hard to focus; trouble with reading comprehension; memory problems
	Family obligations	Had to support family; had to provide financially for family; family expected him to contribute
	Personal relationships	Problems with significant other; Relationship breakup
5. Desired campus supports	Administrator availability	No support when leaving; no one reached out; No one reached out, No exit interview
	Lack of supports Advisors were not helpful	

**Issues of Trustworthiness**

Researchers establish trustworthiness in qualitative research to communicate to readers the valid nature of the study, perhaps to a lesser extent than in quantitative research. The research design of this study follows the guidelines for credibility,

transferability, reliability, and confirmability in qualitative methodology. In this section, I describe how I established these facets of trustworthiness in this research study.

### **Credibility**

Credibility in qualitative research is similar to internal validity in quantitative studies. The qualitative methodology includes specific ways to test credibility. One of these is transcript review. I offered a transcript review to the participants, but all participants declined this review. I was not aware of the reasons for their denial to review the transcript and proceeded on the assumption that they felt comfortable with their contribution. I reviewed the data further after the participants declined to read their responses and assessed they were expressing their experiences. Some of the responses could have been more articulate and stated in a clearer manner but given the setting and possible stress of the interview the participant may have incorrectly used phrasing of words and sentences formulated improperly.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is the degree to which a study's findings may apply to others who have experienced the same or similar phenomena (Patton, 2002). Because the study participant sample of eight male individuals was small, transferability is limited. However, other researchers may find value in the findings. A description defining the interview setting and data collection process, as well as the process used to analyze the data, provide other researchers with understanding of the context if they use the findings to guide research on male attrition.

**Dependability**

I established dependability in this research study using strategies to maintain a consistent data analysis wherein participants were asked to provide their experiences on the research topic. I also accomplished this by establishing a research trail for transitioning the raw interview data into the research findings. Finally, I established dependability of these data by external audit that reflected a consistency within the data that the participants were for the most part similar in their responses about their experiences.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability in qualitative research refers to the degree to which the data support the research findings. The authenticity of the statements through the researcher's experience of contextual analysis of themes develops a methodological strategy to improve confirmability. The essence is the researcher's contribution to the analysis bringing forth a textual interpretation, and the ability for future researchers to confirm the findings in different populations based on different geographic or scholarly settings. Ultimately, I found patterns of perceptions and experiences common within this sample that support the research questions in terms of retention and attrition. The data from participants' responses created a base of information from which to focus on better academic experiences for men who are thinking of dropping out of college.

**Discrepant Cases**

Discrepant cases refer to those cases in a research study that differ significantly from the other cases. In qualitative research, within each theme there is often some



degree of variation. I factored all participants into the analysis and accounted for them in the themes. In this research study there were no discrepant cases that arose in the analysis.

## **Results**

The data analysis yielded a hierarchy of codes, subthemes, and themes. Table 2 presented the five themes that emerged from the data analysis: a feeling of not belonging, financial concerns, challenging timeframes in college life, personal demands and challenges, and desire for campus supports. The 14 sub-themes that emerged within the five themes were, respectively: disappointing experiences with faculty and administration and feeling discrimination and alienation; financial insecurity, loss of financial aid, and ineligible for financial aid; lack of free time, too much free time, and time management problems; mental health challenges, family obligations, and personal relationships; and administrator availability, lack of campus supports, and advisors were not helpful.

The five themes and their subthemes, as illustrated in Table 2, aligned with and addressed the two research questions. In this section, I present these themes and subthemes and provide rich descriptions of the data to show how they address the research questions.

### **Theme 1: A Feeling of not Belonging**

The first theme, a feeling of not belonging, addresses the research question focused on the participants' experience being a student in college. There were two subthemes: feeling discrimination and alienation and disappointing experiences with faculty and administration, I sought to discover how men described their experiences

leading to the decision to discontinue their community college education. Matt stated, “Towards the end of my last semester, I ended up--- I was just like, ‘I don’t want to do this anymore.’” Sam stated, “There were issues with communications between me and the school as a whole throughout the entirety of my time there.” Sam continued by addressing his frustration with the administration by stating,

...at least no way that I was aware of, there may be, to try and regain the momentum that had been lost, it sort of became a downward spiral where bad communication led to bad communication, and it all just fed on itself.

Within the theme *a feeling of not belonging*, a number of phrases were expressed by all the participants. Some had felt that the registration process was complicated, and they did not receive help with this process as needed. Advisors could have helped more with some difficult problems the participants were experiencing and faculty could have assisted the participants who were having learning issues. Sam experienced limited faculty time issues,

Beyond finding a time to pull out of my own schedule to go and meet with them during their office hours, it felt kind of hard to get touch with them. But any time I was able to, they were glad to help and glad to pull away from whatever they’re doing.

Others felt they were not as smart as some other students and felt favoritism by the teacher toward better students. A perception of discrimination and alienation was expressed by some of the participants in their classroom and extra-curricular activities and Austin made a choice to separate himself. Austin stated, “...this semester I was like,

I'm not going to make any friends. I don't know how long I'm going to stay in this semester. So, I just didn't try to make any friends. I just of kept to myself.”

The findings regarding their limited sense of belonging are categorized and illustrated in the two subthemes below, starting with their feelings of discrimination or alienation.

**Feeling discrimination or alienation.** Five of eight participants described perceptions of discrimination or alienation in the college classroom, either from others or internally. Andy described a perception of alienation by his feeling like he was not as smart as his classmates. He believed that he was getting a “dumbered [sic] down experience” in comparison to what the other students were receiving. Andy mentioned that while in high school “I just felt like if you're a girl, you're probably smarter.” In college, “Oh, I'm the dumb guy in here” with a majority of females. He said that this feeling that he was not as smart as other students (females, in particular) led him to quit applying himself academically because he no longer cared if he did well or not. Eventually, this perception of a “dumbered (sic) down” experience led to his to departure from college. Andy said in the “Second half of classes the last semester, I just stopped showing up, and then the next semester. I didn't sign up.”

Andy and Matt believed that their professors favored the better students, which did not include them. Andy stated that, “if I wasn't paying attention and stuff like that, they wouldn't really put up with it, [paying attention]” and “if I was doing my work they would help me more in class than if I wasn't [doing the work].” Matt described the

experience of being in a college math class where he thought the professor had a clear favorite.

Jon and Cal described a perception of discrimination in other ways. Jon stated he was on the shy, quiet side, and suggested this impacted his ability to talk to people and make friends. Jon expressed that this was the source of some alienation from others and of his classmates he said, “if you were kind of quiet and shy, they didn’t talk to you that much.” Cal also expressed some alienation from classmates. Like John, he described himself as shy: “if you were kind of quiet and shy, they didn’t talk to you that much.”, Cal also thought that his sense of alienation was because there was a lack of intermural sports on his college campus. Cal, who is mixed-race said

Your friends are going to be your teammates. And some of the teammates just weren’t wanting to be a friend with me for that reason [being of mixed race] I feel like. So, if you want to call that alienation, sure. I still have my other friends.

He was used to playing sports and there was a lack of intermural sports on his college campus. He was used to playing sports and making friends through those sports programs, and in the absence of those, making friends was more of a challenge. Cal said that “there wasn’t the same sense of camaraderie without intermural activities,” which he believed led to his feeling of alienation and added “I think it entertains people because you look at high school, a big thing that is easy for people to rally around is a sports program. School spirit is a big thing.”

**Disappointing experiences with faculty and administration.** Four participants described negative experiences with either administration or faculty on the college

campus that they left. Austin described an unfortunate experience that he went through while enrolling in classes, wherein his identity had been mistaken for someone else's. Austin stated "They found a file with my name on it, apparently, from a university in Texas in 1994. The only problem with that is I wasn't born yet." Because of this mix-up, Austin had difficulty enrolling in classes because the college administrators thought that he owed money for a previous enrollment period. Austin stated, "That happened a week before the year's semester started." Austin stated this was difficult to sort out, and he did not feel that the administrators were helpful throughout this process. Austin described the registrar as adopting an attitude of, "we should have caught this, but we didn't" and then not helping him get the situation sorted out. Though he said he was not under a suspension for non-payment, Austin reported that his classes were mysteriously dropped halfway through the semester anyway. Austin was able to finally register for classes but dropped the classes in mid-semester. Austin related "I decided to drop about little less than halfway through the first semester... This is too stressful, I'm just going to drop out." After the hassle that he went through in trying to address the problem, Austin's perception was he decided to drop out.

Matt also perceived needless complications on the part of administration saying, "when I registered, they made it really complicated." Further, he stated that his advisor "could have helped a lot more than what she did." In discussions with his advisor, Matt said "My advisor kept trying to switch [steer me in another direction]". He was steered in directions that were uncomfortable, particularly regarding his major, which he had already researched and felt comfortable. Matt felt comfortable in a degree program

involving photography. Matt stated “I felt she was underestimating me, kind of contradicting me saying, ‘No you don’t want to do that. You want to go do this’.”

Four of the eight of the participants stated that they experienced problems with some of the faculty. For instance, Sam reported that he had a difficult time tracking down his professors. Sam said, “the faculty members were busy pretty much always.” If he was able to find time to meet with them, they were difficult to get in touch with. Sam experienced this even during the professors’ scheduled office hours.

Cal reported that he had some good experiences with faculty – a sports coach -- in high school. But he specifically recounted a negative experience that he had with the professor in a college course he took. Cal believed the “professor was super harsh on me specifically to the point where it felt that the professor was trying to fail me purposely”. Cal said that the experience, “rubbed me the wrong way.” Cal escalated his concern about the situation within the academic department and those administrators found in his favor. A sense of belonging brings student satisfaction in their academic endeavors and a hope for future success as they move toward a degree.

## **Theme 2: Financial Concerns**

Most participants described financial concerns as reasons for leaving school. These concerns related to not being able to make ends meet, losing their financial aid money, or not being eligible for financial aid. Loss of or ineligibility for financial aid was a concern for many of the participants. Some of the financial issues were Pell grants that were all used up, lost scholarship, didn’t want loan debt, ineligible for GI bill, and denied a disability-based scholarship. Andy stated, “I had to go see the financial aid board, so I

[could] get financial aid again because how low my GPA was. I had to have suspensions on my account to where I couldn't do certain things until I had the grades" Jon had a plan to stay in college because

I wanted to have a backup career as a vet[erinarian] tech. So, my plan was to stay in college for the next 10 years and eventually move to a state college, and just the whole financial aid thing. I mean, not being able to come back until I paid that just kind of slammed the door shut.

. The tuition at a community college is substantially lower than attending a 4-year institution and it still can be demanding on some students to pay out-of-pocket for tuition, books, and fees. Tuition can range from \$50.00 to \$150.00 per credit at some community colleges plus books and other fees. I will describe the findings related to each of the three subthemes.

**Financial insecurity.** Jon described struggling financially when his student financial aid money failed to arrive, and he could not purchase his textbooks. Jon said, "when my financial aid never came through, I wasn't able to buy books, it just... and then I would go ask. And all the way until October, still no help with finding it". He said that he had applied for scholarships but was denied. Jon lacked confidence in his ability to find sources of financial aid, and a friend helped him navigate that process, but he was still unable to obtain funding. Austin also described the feeling that money was tight. Austin stated "Wow, I have no money for anything". He received some grant money for college but found that it did not go far. Austin disclosed "And plus the car payment, that's always fun. But I didn't really have money to spend if I wanted to continue my

higher education”. When Austin discovered that he needed a new laptop to complete his coursework, and that he had to make a monthly car payment on top of that, he said that his budget became very tight and he was forced to make some decisions regarding spending money on higher education. Austin discovered when applying for financial aid “I tried to get Pell Grants, but I just didn’t get accepted”.

**Loss of financial aid.** Nick, Matt, and Jon described the experience of losing their financial aid money. Nick described a letter he got.

So, I found out one semester ‘your federal student loans have been cut off because you’ve used up all your credits’. So basically, I haven’t taken a single required course and they told me my student loans have been cut off, my Pell Grants, and everything else.

Jon also had funding in the form of a Pell Grant, but that money ran out, and reported “just the whole financial thing, I mean, not being able to come back until I paid that, and just kind of slammed the door shut”. Matt had financial aid money coming in through his employment but was put on academic probation after poor academic performance in his first and second years of college, explaining, “I had been denied scholarships and grants. I was just like, ‘There’s no point in it. I’m probably not going to get it anyway’”. He also offered “I never wanted to go into debt, I don’t want to, I’m only 19. I don’t want to accumulate a crap-ton of debt and having to pay it off until 40”.

**Ineligible for financial aid.** Sam, Nick, and Jon stated directly that they left school because of economic hardship. Sam said that after a negative experience at a technical school, “I had run out of money, and so entered the workforce to try and pay off



the mounting student loans.” After his wife got pregnant, Nick dropped out of college to join the workforce so that he could support his growing family financially. Nick said, “I left because I was told there was no more money available to me, so I couldn’t afford it anymore”. Finally, Jon described how expectations imposed on him by his family became overwhelming to the extent that his grades suffered. Jon stated, “My dad died when I was little younger, and so it’s always been on my shoulders to help out the rest of the family and try to hold the family together”. His wife was pregnant, and that concern was a heavy burden. Jon left because “my grades fell behind. And because of that, I lost my financial aid. And then, when I tried to come back, they told me I would have to pay out-of-pocket, and financial aid was non-available because I was in academic probation”. This led to his placement on academic probation and subsequent ineligibility for continued financial aid.

Jon, Cal, and Aaron said that they left school to make more money in the short ter. For instance, Aaron described working for a car dealership, stating that:

I kind of worked part-time person in service for a while through school. So, I decided I’d always wanted to try sales. School was getting kind of irritable and was annoying at the time. So, I decided, well, I’ve got a bunch of free time. If I can stop school for a while I can go back at some point if I needed to, but just something I always wanted to do and pursuing a business degree in business management, I feel like some sales experience couldn’t hurt for sure, at the same time.

### **Theme 3: Challenging Timeframes in College Life**

Many participants spoke about a lack of preparation for college vis-à-vis inadequate time management skills and lack of self-discipline. While only three participants stated outright that they felt unprepared for college, they spoke in other ways about this feeling. The theme *challenging timeframes in college life* had three subthemes: lack of free time, too much free time, and time management problems, each of which I describe below with illustrations from the interviews. Too much extra time led to distractions and too much freedom that was not properly used. Lacked motivation, lacked discipline, was unorganized, and had no discipline to manage time are the reasons many participants shared for leaving college.

**Lack of free time.** Sam, Jon, and Austin described lacking free time while they were in school. Jon had a hard time finding free time between working full-time and attending school full-time, which was compounded by his household responsibilities. Jon said, “I didn’t have any freedom. I was working full-time and just, well, coming here full-time, and dealing with household stuff, and there was no freedom at all”. Aaron said, “Oh yeah, for sure”. Austin said that though he did not have problems with school, the challenge was “when I got home, and I had homework, trying to find all the time to manage family, friends, and other work that I had to do.” Sam stated, “But I did grow and learn a lot over the time having been thrown in head first. But it was definitely part of the reason why I ended up falling apart at the end was the inexperience with having to handle my own time management”.

**Too much free time.** On the other hand, Nick, Sam, and Andy described that the new-found freedom and unstructured free time that college afforded them became problematic. Sam said, “I had time on my hand, which would lead to me getting further and further distracted, and it just sort of all spiraled out.” Andy found himself in a similar situation, and he also connected this to his poor academic performance. Andy said:

there was a lot of freedom my first go around in college, too much, in my opinion. Maybe I just wasn’t taking enough classes or something. But there was just too much because I would try and go home whenever I could, even though I lived a decent way away from campus, instead of just staying there. I just didn’t manage it well enough to do well.

Nick said, “80% of the time I would make sure I did my assignment. Twenty percent of the time I’m going to hang out with my friends and my homework later”.

**Time management problems.** Andy, Cal, and Sam described how their lack of time skills affected how to use their time. Andy said that

my grades were okay. The only thing that I think was a big problem was I didn’t know how to manage my time. Being in high school, you go from like 8 am to 3 pm. Your classes are all in that exact time frame. In college it’s different. You get to pick your classes. And that sounds great. But then you’re responsible to go into class. If you take a 10 am and a 2 pm on the same day, it’s going to be hard for you to want to stay on campus from 11-2 to go to class. So, I wasn’t told how to manage my time better. There was no help in that category. It was just all on my own. And I feel like that was one of the biggest things. Because once I found a

schedule and a routine that I could stick to, everything just clicked, and it made everything run.

Andy had a difficult time managing his homework, because he wanted to do other things like sleep, play video games, or watch movies. Cal had time management problems, stating

Yeah, I would say a little bit. I took probably 16 hours for both semesters.... So, I mean a good chunk of my time was spent in the classroom, and then obviously out of the classroom studying. So, time management was forced to just use your time for school, because if you didn't you'd fall behind and start getting bad grades.

Some of the participants also talked about how their lack of motivation negatively impacted their academic performance. Sam intended to go to a community college for two semesters and then transfer when he had saved up the money. Sam said, "after a single semester here, I had found myself slowly just reaching a point where I was no longer actively going to class because I just could not find the motivation to do so." Sam lacked interest in the classes that he was taking and enjoyed hanging out and talking with other students more interesting than what he is learning in his classes. Cal also felt his motivation drop after seeing that he was not doing well in his classes. For Cal, this fed into a cycle of poor academic performance, losing motivation, and then even poorer academic performance. Cal stated that:

For the courses that were hard for me, it's just such a struggle to just get your (assignment) done when you keep not doing it right. And then that translates

when you take your quizzes and tests and you see you're not doing that great compared to others.

Aaron also had time management problems between work and school.

Working between 25-32 hours each week while attending classes... I would set it up to where I'd go to school one day a week and the next day I'd go to just handle my work. The next day I'd have all my classes set up.

Instead of doing homework on his off days, however, he worked and surfed the internet instead of focusing on his studies. Matt was also employed while he was in college. Matt said that he got

burnt out...I was working two jobs because I was living on my own, and I had to also pay for school. So, I was always constantly working and then I'd be staying up late at night trying to get all my homework done and stuff like that.

For Matt, the workload and financial struggles were tied together.

Aaron also left when he lost motivation after poor performance.

I work at a [car] dealership and I kind of worked as a part-time person in service for a while through school. So, I decided I always wanted to try sales. School was getting kind of irritable and was annoying at the time.

Aaron lacked the motivation to study and indicated that if he had listened to his parents about studying more, he may still be in school. Aaron stated, "I had a hard time trying to get motivated for stuff I don't like to do". Similarly, Matt was bored with his classes and did not want to put in the effort required of him to succeed in his coursework. Matt said,

I took an art history class and all we did was they handed us a big book and told us, ‘oh you’re to read this many pages before you next class’. I love reading but if it’s a boring subject, it’s kind of hard to get into.

This lack of effort translated to a lost scholarship, which led him to drop out.

Austin experienced a similar burnout moving into his second year of school.

Austin spoke about how he was motivated in his first year to finish up his classes early.

“But as I hit my second year, I’m like, ‘Is this really what I want?’” he said. Austin indicated that he might be interested in finishing his degree later but decided to enlist in the military after leaving college. Austin stated, “And, I’m also going into the military, so I can’t really do both at the same time”.

#### **Theme 4: Personal Demands and Challenges**

Most participants also faced struggles in their personal lives. Though the nature of these personal challenges varied, all noted these challenges impacted their academic performance and led them to drop out. The theme *personal demands and challenges* included subthemes: mental health challenges, family obligations, and personal relationships. All these personal challenges led to participants’ academic schedules leading to under performance, which they believe led to their departure from college.

**Mental health challenges.** Nick and Aaron struggled with diagnosed mental health challenges. Nick turned to the disability resource center in his campus for support, which he said was helpful. Nick indicated the disability resource center allowed a note taker. “One of my accommodations was a note taker. I can either pay attention to what the teacher’s saying or can pay attention to what I’m writing. I can’t seem to do both. So,

the teacher's made sure I had a note taker". Nick revealed "I've been diagnosed bipolar, OCD, ADHE, and PTSD. So, with the medications I take, sometimes I just sleep. I have a very hard [time} keeping a regular sleeping schedule". However, he described the challenges to maintaining a regular schedule and getting a good night of sleep that his disabilities presented. Aaron struggled similarly, and this impacted his reading comprehension and focus. Aaron said that this was a problem in classes because he would complete a reading assignment and would not retain any of the information that he had just read. Arron stated

I had ADD and I forget things a lot if I can't focus on it for a while. So, doing something on one day and then coming to class the next day, I'm like "Oh crap, I have home work". "They put me on Adderall for a while whenever I was young. I'd say it worked.

**Family obligations.** Sam, Nick, and Jon described leaving school due, in part, to family obligations. Sam had to step in when his stepfather was unable to support his mother, who was in a doctoral program at the time, and siblings. Nick said that he, "had to stop going to school and go to real life," after he married and then learned that he and his wife were expecting a child. Nick was offered a good-paying job that he enjoyed, and so left school. Finally, Jon talked about growing up with his mom, brother, and nephew after his dad died when he was young. The burden of responsibility for his family fell to him, and Jon said that, "trying to do everything just became a little overwhelming school-wise".

**Personal relationships.** For Jon and Andy, personal relationships with significant others also interfered with their schoolwork. In addition to family obligations, Jon struggled with dating a drug addict while he was in school. Jon was also trying to open his own restaurant at the time. Jon said,

A little bit of craziness in life and trying to work full time and go to school. It all ran together. I had a girlfriend at the time that I found out was a drug addict while I was dating her, and I was trying to help open a restaurant at the same time and I just became a little overwhelmed.

Andy described a breakup with a girlfriend with whom he was living while attending classes.

And she left and at that time my main goal was not college. I didn't care about going to school. I dropped out of my classes and I was not, first of all, I wasn't a good student. Because I was so into having at the time what I thought was where I was supposed to be, with her and living.

When they broke up he stopped attending his classes because he didn't want to see her. This, coupled with his poor academic performance until that point, fed into his decision to quit college.

### **Theme 5: Desire for Campus Supports**

The theme *desire for campus supports* answers the research question 2 about supports for male students before exiting college. Subthemes for the theme are: *administrator availability, lack of campus supports, and advisors were not helpful*. Nick, Jon, and Matt felt that there were campus supports in place when they attended the



community college. These three participants felt the supports should have been there, but all three reported they didn't receive any support when they made the decision to leave. Nick stated the decision to leave and the lack of support when doing so followed learning that he was no longer eligible for student financial aid. Unaware that his financial aid would run out, he did not focus on taking his prerequisite classes. Of this experience, Nick said:

When I found out the money had been cut off, I went to an advisor to see what classes I needed to do to get my degree. And there was [sic] a great deal of prereqs that I had to do that I was not aware of, or I kind of knew prereqs were there but I wasn't really focusing on them. And then the advisor and I went to the financial aid office and asked for extensions or let me have more credits and I'll only take my prereqs and they said, "too bad, so sad". The money is gone. And so that was basically it. Yeah.

Nick stated further that, "I was told that it would be beneficial to finish, it would be good for me to finish, but no one really had any plans for or how to or ideas on how to get the financial help." Matt also sought help from an advisor when he felt like leaving., "I tried to get a meeting with an advisor, but it would always have to be like 3 weeks in advance or something like that." This was challenging because he did not have his work schedule that far in advance, and as a result, he never spoke with an adviser. Others felt the lack of college support when no one reached out to them to secure their college continuation.

Jon felt like a lot of the administrative work fell to him when he was in college. Jon stated “I believe it was on me trying to handle everything. Reaching out to different advisors became discouraging. Yeah, telling eight different people the same story twice got a little discouraging in trying to make it all work”. He didn’t believe that the administration was streamlined, and if he wanted to talk to anyone when he left, he would have had to go through multiple people, which was a prospect that he found discouraging. When Jon left, he said that, “no one ever reached out to me or tried to talk me out of it.” None of the eight participants had an opportunity for an exit interview when they decided to leave the college.

I asked Andy “did an advisor or someone else from the college reach out to you about an exit interview?” Andy responded, “No one reached out when I left.” Andy further commented

Second half of classes the last semester, I just stopped showing up, and then the next semester, I didn’t show up. Oh yeah. I wish someone had grabbed me and told me, I wish someone would’ve told me, “don’t leave’.

Andy just left.

### **Summary**

Five themes emerged from the study data: a feeling of not belonging, financial concerns, challenging timeframes in college life, personal demands and challenges, and desire for campus supports. Most participants described some combination of these themes as influential in their decision to drop out of college in their first or second years. Several participants described negative experiences with either the college administration

or faculty members. For some, this experience related to feeling discriminated against or alienated or that they were not as smart as other students. Four of the participants spoke of a lack of support when they decided to drop out, in that they perceived no one from the school reached out to them.

Many participants also felt financial insecurity. Some participants struggled with balancing jobs and classes just to make ends meet, and when coupled with losing financial aid or lacking other outside assistance, they felt like they had no choice but to drop out. Participants also described a lack of preparation in terms of the skills required to succeed in college. For some, this was managing the little free time that they had while for others, this was managing too much free time and the newfound freedom that can come with being a college student. They also described how a lack of motivation and organization, in the absence of self-discipline, caused them to miss classes, which negatively impacted their academic performance.

Participants also felt demands and challenges in their personal lives. Two participants struggled with their mental health, which impacted their class performance. Some had obligations to their families, which caused them financial stress and more constraints on their free time. Two of the young men described problems with their significant others that took energy and focus away from their schoolwork.

Four of the participants discussed the desire for campus supports. The decision to depart the college was apparent for one participant who expressed he had hoped someone would have reached out to him before left college. He just didn't show up the next semester. Three participants had similar occurrences with administrators and staff where

there was the perception of an indifference or discounting of their dilemma in finding a solution their situation. Financial insecurity, the feeling of one student who felt the job of correcting faulty information fell on him instead of the college administrators and advisor pushed one student in a direction he was not prepared to go.

All these factors intersected in different ways for the eight participants in this research study. In Chapter 5, I interpret these key findings within the contextual framework of this study as well as the empirical literature I reviewed in Chapter 2 and describe the implications of these findings as well as recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of the qualitative study was to explore the experiences of male college students who left a community college in the Southcentral United States in their first or second year. The central problem as observed in this study is the increasing attrition of men in U.S. higher education. As this study suggests, relatively little is known about male attrition and retention in higher education institutions, especially in community colleges.

Two research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do men describe their experiences leading to the decision to discontinue their community college education?

RQ2: What supports do men perceive colleges could offer to support their decision to continue postsecondary education?

After analysis of the data, five themes emerged and the first four address RQ1: a feeling of not belonging, financial concerns, challenging timeframes in college life, and personal demands and challenges. The final theme addresses RQ2: desired campus supports. The subthemes for a feeling of not belonging are disappointing experiences with faculty and administration and feeling discrimination or alienation. Sub-themes for the theme of financial concerns are financial insecurity, loss of financial aid, ineligible for financial aid. Subthemes for the theme of challenging timeframes in college life are lack of free time, too much free time, and time management problems. Subthemes for the theme of personal demands and challenges are mental health challenges, family obligations, and personal relationships. Subthemes for the last theme of desired campus

supports are administrator availability, lack of campus supports, and advisors were not helpful.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Many of the findings in Chapter 4 were consistent with studies of retention and attrition I reviewed in Chapter 2. Other researchers found reasons why higher education male students have left college before obtaining a degree similar to the five defined themes presented in this study: a feeling of not belonging, financial concerns, challenging timeframes in college life, personal demands and challenges, and desired campus supports and the 14 subthemes, which I will interpret in light of the literature review. For instance, researchers have also found evidence regarding the impact of financial concerns and family demands (Severians & ten Dam, 2012; Strayhorn, 2008).

#### **A Feeling of not Belonging**

A sense of not belonging in higher education, as expressed by the participants, was also evident in the literature. Conger and Long (2010) also found men left college more often because there was not a sense of belonging at their institution. Perhaps some male students do not expect a sense of belonging in a society that makes them feel masculinity is a threat as Wagner (2015) suggested. Strayhorn (2012b) found that a sense of belonging was lacking in the Black males' selection for their college of choice. He found Black students would like to go their college of choice; however, this sense of belonging was not critical in the eyes of the male student and they would accept any college that would take them.

The participants' sense of not belonging may reflect the importance of "involvement" as characterized in a theory developed by Astin (2006), who found that a lack of student involvement relates to an adverse retention rate. Astin's theory of student involvement includes the assumption "that the greater the student's level of involvement or engagement, the greater the chances of degree completion" (p. 12). Astin suggested the involvement or engagement can be measured by the study time a student spent on campus, time spent engaged in organizations, time talking with faculty, or time spent interacting in on and off campus activities. The participants in my study had limited involvement in each of these ways. Moore (2012) also found engagement to be critical among Black students in rural community colleges and led to an easier transition from high school to college and being more likely to reach their academic goals.

A subtheme of disappointing experiences with faculty and administration and feelings of discrimination and alienation from others not reaching out to them with support to secure their college continuation may also be reflected in Strayhorn's (2012b) finding that success is dependent upon a sense of connection to the institution. Along with Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement, Strayhorn believed that being a part of something was key to success, including involvement and persistence in college life. Severians and Ten Dam (2012) found that male college students were not as satisfied with interactions and mentoring experiences with faculty as were female students. Bean (1983) compared the workplace to the college campus and found that satisfaction was an approval mechanism supported by a sense of belonging.

Several other studies have addressed the need for belonging. Field (2018) discussed methods to retain students beyond the first year. The suggestions were enhancing academic advising, increasing a sense of belonging, and insuring early recognition of who the student is and their needs. The participants I interviewed were largely not satisfied with academic advising, for example, two of the participants who were taking medications to control their anxiety and inattentiveness might have used some extra support and advice.

Half of the participants stated that they experienced problems with some of the faculty, while others had some good experiences with the faculty and administration. Strayhorn (2008b), in studying the experience of Black men on college campuses, found that supportive relationships, such as those with faculty, were transformative with outcomes leading to academic satisfaction and belonging.

### **Financial Concerns**

The theme of financial concerns was evident in six of the interviews with only two participants being aware that their families had financial resources that were sufficient to the degree that they did not have to apply for financial aid. The others needed some form of financial aid and found that it was sometimes hard or impossible to obtain for expenses, books, and tuition. Late disbursement of aid or loss of financial aid created a sense of insecurity, as did being ineligible for financial aid. In other studies, financial aid was a factor in determining whether the student would be eligible for enough aid to finish their term or college itself. Field (2018) also found support for additional sources of financial aid was important for retention. Dwyer (2013) reported



that men attending college have a trade-off decision to make when it comes to completing a college degree: whether they spend 4 years in college and finance the degree with loans and eventually be required to pay back or drop out and seek employment and not have the debt to contend with in their future years.

Wohlgemuth et al. (2007) focused on a number of financial variables critical to student retention through graduation. One such variable was financial aid in the form of a loan, a gift, and/or sources at the college level. The financial concerns of the participants in this study expressed a need for more aid or access to more sources of financial aid.

### **Challenging Timeframes in College Life**

The challenging timeframes in college life was a major theme in the lives of the eight participants. External commitments were referred to as altering a student's intentions to persist in college, such as jobs, family, friends, and employment. Prior researchers also found that lack of motivation and persistence toward addressing academic assignments was a major factor in male poor performance at the college level (Daprement, 2014; Hansen et al., 2014; Tinto, 1993). D'Amico et al. (2014) found that serious academic challenges occurred when men's time was devoted to family, friends, and employment. All the participants stated that time with family, friends, and employment became a part of their academic challenges and the decision to depart the college, which aligned with D'Amico et al.'s findings. While Permzadian and Crede (2016) observed new student orientation can be important for many first-year students to acclimatize to the campus and to apprise them of the many student resources available, the participants did not talk about new student orientation.

Barnett (2011) commented on the need for integration when he suggested academic activities are the tools that motivate students to use their time more effectively and that wise time use leads to greater integration. Severians and Ten Dam (2012) indicated that women had study habits different from their male counterparts and managed time better. Severians and Ten Dam also found women were better at the noncognitive learning skills that rewarded their goal of a higher education degree while men were less interested in higher education because their earning ability was greater even without a postsecondary degree. Severians and Ten Dam also found that male college students were not as satisfied with interactions and mentoring experiences with faculty as female students. Marrs and Sigler (2012) found women found a deep approach more satisfactory than men who went for the achieving approach, learning just enough to past the exam. In other words, women chose detail as a satisfactory means of knowledge while men were satisfied with just learning what was needed to get through the class.

### **Personal Demands and Challenges**

There was a lack of motivation for some as a result of their personal lives being disrupted either by personal relationships or by medical issues from earlier periods in their lives. Two of the participants related being given medication for issues of inattentiveness in the classroom. The participants spoke about having mental health challenges disrupting their school activities, family obligations that took away from school work, and personal relationship problems that became contentious and developed into breakups of the relationship.

Crede and Niehorster (2012) found that adjustment to college was a multicultural construct consisting of academic, social, and personal-emotional adjustment, as well as institutional attachment. Strayhorn (2008b) discussed the personal problems many Black male students face when attending higher education. “The problem is exacerbated by the fact that that disparaging words can perpetuate negative stereotypes among educators which, in turn, can become self-fulfilling and self-threatening” (p. 27). One of participants, a mixed-race student, had experiences where he felt uncomfortable around other students. This participant, who was into sports, found some disparaging words and comments may have been directed toward him.

Wagner (2015) discussed masculinity and the implications of being a man in modern society. Her study included male participants who spoke about their masculinity and what it means to be a man. They described themselves as stoic, strong, and someone who can survive and thrive. The participants in my study also projected the need to be strong and stoic with feelings of concern for their families and friends. Two of the participants were put on medication at an early age and felt that this created their inability to focus, which seemed to reduce their strength as students.

Kleinfeld (2009b) described a boy crisis fueled by overhyped rhetoric and the movement of advancing girls. According to Kleinfeld, what is at stake is boys falling behind in academic achievement and college graduation. Kleinfeld discussed mental health among young men aged 20–24-year-old who she found commit 20.7 suicides per 100,000 compared to 3.5 per 100,000 among women. Men this age also experienced depression, conduct disorders, ADHD disorders, premature deaths and injuries, and

delinquency and arrests for violent crimes, property crimes, and drug abuse crimes more often than women. Only in arrest rates for runaways did women have more arrests than males. She suggested the difficulties of boys have wider areas of concern and are more serious, and claimed this issue is being neglected. The findings of this study also suggest that men at risk of dropping out of community college need more attention.

### **Desired Campus Supports**

Participants claimed they found little or no help from the administrators or advisors when they needed assistance. An exit interview would have allowed the student the ability to express their desire to continue if the opportunity arose. Wang et al. (2014) assessed mental health, academic performance, and behavioral trends of 75 college students using a smartphone application in a smartphone programming class. The sensor recorded data for certain student activities over 24 hours for a 10-week period. The application recorded exit survey data points when leaving the class and exit interviews to validate students' calendars and returned assignments. The findings in this study indicated what is already known in higher education, that students get stressed as the term progresses and student attendance decreases. Wang et al. (2014) found no correlation between attendance and academic performance. More data are needed to assess the effects of exit interviews as students leave higher education.

More than half of the participants gave negative responses when asked if academic advising was helpful in the planning of a program and advising them in their first year at the community college. These participants were not impressed with their experience with academic advising. The participants indicated they had to wait,

sometimes for weeks, to meet with an advisor and then their advice was not the direction the student wanted his career path to take. Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, and Hawthorne, (2013) asked, regarding academic advising and student success, is academic advising a meaningful event in the student's entry into higher education? They found that for first-year students it was a step toward a new dimension in their academic life. For more advanced students the need for advising may not be as advantageous because they are on a career path toward the end. They concluded that "advisors have an immediately meaningful impact on students during the first year of college and the opportunity for continuing influence as students work toward degree completion" (p. 16).. Swecker, Fifolt, and Searby's (2013) concluded institutions need to add additional training for advisors addressing the needs of students who are first-generation enrollees. They also suggested institutions increase the capacity of time spent engaging with and actively supporting the institution with these first-year students.

Donaldson, McKinney, Lee, and Pino (2016) also investigated the academic advising and its role on the student. The investigation found that academic advising can be intrusive and can be also helpful to the student. In this study, many of the participants found academic advising intrusive, not helpful, ill-informed, and a waste of their time. Field (2018) suggested methods to retain students beyond the first year, including additional enhanced academic advising, sense of belonging, and early recognition of who the student is and their needs. While the participants in my study complained about the lack of good advising as they were thinking about leaving, it's possible that opportunities were missed to give them excellent advising as they entered, particularly around course

choices and scheduling that would help them earn prerequisites and align with their work schedules.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study was limited by a smaller number of participants than originally planned. Timing and scheduling became an issue with some of the participants, as we tried to work around their schedules and my schedule. Evidence of trustworthiness suggests the possibility participants were expressing their experiences in a truthful manner. None of the participants refused to answer any of the questions and probes. I felt confident each one of the men were genially forthright with their answers and hopefully proud that their experiences could make a better college experience for future students. Regarding generalizability, it is hoped the detailed findings suggested with extensive quotes from the participants fits with generic qualitative methodology and may be useful for other researchers and practitioners who are studying populations that may be similar.

### **Recommendations**

The study's findings suggest recommendations for future research that may further the male college students' advancement to graduation. This study will not be the final word on the subject of male college student retention and attrition. Much more research into the male college student background, proficiency, and academic acceptance of male's students may be required before higher education institutions have parity between the genders. Females have a head start in GPAs, graduation, and attentiveness in the college classroom, but males can catch up (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2008; Conger & Long, 2010). More research could be done on medicated youth in the early years of their

education to reduce personal problems that interfere with retention. In addition, creating a sense of belonging and developing better time management and study habits for these working male college students are areas where higher education can improve.

Perrais (2008) recommended campus workshops and activities to develop academic abilities that target male students. For instance, in my own field, workshops targeting underdeveloped skills in the terminology and language of scientific, math, and other disciplines can help the student converse with individuals of the same skill set. Workshops work well in the trade industries where community colleges have a foothold training an apprentice workforce.

### **Implications**

Implications for positive social change developed through analyzing the interviews with eight participants, which allowed them to express the feeling and experiences they encountered in a community college setting. The positive social change incorporated in this research seeks to open colleges to a new generation of college students known as the forgotten male, the male college student. Considering male college students have challenges, such as those identified in this research, may take some time understanding, but working to change their habits, skills, and assumptions may deliver more deliberate and dedicated male students to the classroom.

### **Plan for the Future**

Positive social change in the form of increased retention for male students, may result from placing additional efforts to support them, thus bringing the male student a sense of belonging to the college with a pride of succeeding. Male college students who

drop out of college can have a difficult path, if for some unknown reason, they get injured on the job, injured outside the workplace, and do not have a college degree, the college degree can be their path to another career. It may also be that their current employment gets eliminated and the college degree is required for other employment. The college degree can be the backstop path for college students. That backstop position alludes to a career path that provides skills in a discipline associated to a college degree. A college degree may not be a goal of a young male, but it may be necessary to use the degree to provide economic security for himself and family.

As some of the participants suggested higher education should emphasize activities in which males have an interest, such as competitive sports programs and creating a feeling of belonging. Academic advising should prepare the student to do more than set up class schedules by listening more to student desires and supporting their academic future. For instance, some of the male participants were not prepared for higher education and class scheduling that allowed a lot of free time could be a distraction. The time management factor seemed to be a concern for a number of the participants. Financial concerns weighed on all but two of the participants and those remaining six that had financial difficulty would have liked a better system of accountability. Given that some of the students took more courses than they needed to and avoided required core classes might suggest requiring those first so that financial aid is used strategically.

In the college where I collected data, exit interviews are not a requirement when a student decides to leave. It is a recommendation of this study that a mechanism be developed to assess the means and manner of a departing student. If the exit interview



can put some light on this event and possibly deter the student from leaving the community college, the college and the student can retain a relationship which benefits both the college and the student. All the participants, when asked if they were asked to give an exit interview before leaving the community college, they said they were not given an opportunity. Minimally, a campus can learn about where risks are for students considering dropping out.

### **Implications of Financial Concerns**

Financial concerns were brought up numerous times and the inability of these males to work their way through the maze of written documents, the forms to fill out, the requirements for repayment, and soliciting their parents to assist in the process became for some of them a nonstarter. Financial requirements are a way of life at the higher education level and finding the financial sources for any student is a chore in itself. It might be advantageous to discover earlier those males who need help beyond their parents. As a few participants found, financial aid may be maze of paper work and time. Seeking help from the financial office may not be the answer but getting help from someone who is familiar with the process, such as a family member, relative, or friend, helped a few participants obtain applications. The younger male may have a better chance of getting financial aid because of their parents or acquaintances who have been through the process. An older male at a non-traditional institution may be able to carry the weight of financing their own education. However, if they have not the means to pay for the education, it may be the exact trigger that eliminates his chances of starting or in some cases continuing his education and completing his degree.

### **Challenges in Time Management**

Interaction with other college students has been suggested by Astin (1993) and others as a means for students to have a sense of belonging. Mentoring on a campus is not new, however, a new approach may be worthwhile exploring. Field (2018) suggested another recommendation might be providing in-class tutors who are students themselves helping the student who is having difficulty in the classroom. These students could be teaching assistants along with the instructor. Many of the students who have a grasp on a subject are proud of their expertise and may more than willing to help any student with a problem or concept. I have students in my classes who are willing to volunteer helping other students with the assignment, especially in labs.

Implications for action include bringing the male community college student into graduation status by considering the male student an equal in all respects. A mentoring program for the male student who has trouble with adapting to the college lifestyle may be good start. The male students who were interviewed had some problems adapting and fitting into college programs by expressing a feeling of not belonging. Another area of concern for the participants was being a non-traditional student when attending a community college. There may be areas that the college can soften the time management challenges and offering more time management seminars or counseling.

Mentoring programs in community college might help those male students who find study and in-class activities boring and not worth their time. It might also be these students were not meant for college. Some of the participants expressed this exact condition in classrooms where boredom and their time was being wasted in the classroom

because the instructor was less than excited about the subject they were teaching. It might generate excitement if the faculty member was more involved in their student's well-being in the classroom. As a result of greater engagement in the classroom, male students may learn to use their time better.

The themes of *personal demands and challenges* and *desired campus supports* suggest a need to reach out to the male students with an exit interview or an attempt to contact the student before they leave the college.

### **Faculty, Academic Advising, and Student Relationships**

Participants would have liked more interaction with staff, faculty, and administrators. It is apparent that when they decided to leave the community college they were not missed, and they believed the college did nothing to retain them as a student. Nontraditional students may require more systematic support and intervention. Different approaches may require the institution to facilitate persistence and engagement on a term-to-term or year-to-year basis (Simmons, 2013).

Barnett (2011) described opportunities for involvement as a precondition for both faculty and students to interact among campus activities and integration. Barnett also suggested faculty see students as capable and worthwhile learners.

Donaldson et al. (2016) investigated the academic advising and its role on the student. The investigation found that academic advising can be intrusive and can be also helpful to the student. In this study, many of the participants found academic advising intrusive, not helpful, ill-informed, and a waste of their time. The implications of this finding are that Donaldson et al. found four major actions of intrusive advising: i.e.

benefits of intrusive advising, limitations of intrusive advising, effective academic advisors, and contributions of academic advising to student success. It is suggested by Donaldson et al. that intrusive academic advising is a key strategy toward student success. For the participants in this study, the value of intrusiveness was too late to save them from leaving. Surely, it can be a factor early in the student's college career to be intrusive, but the community college apparently did not believe in intrusive actions.

Acevedo-Gil and Zerquera (2016) found that first-year experience (FYE) is a means to maximize student success regarding accountability, benchmarks, and equitable distribution of educational resources. These resources include academic and counseling resources available at the college level expanding student success. Acevedo-Gil and Zerquera also found that in-class tutors for first-year enrollees' classes were valuable sources for academic achievement amongst less than able students. Academic advisors were also part of the transition toward this academic success. Again, in this study some of the participants found academic advisors were part of their success. Other participants found advisors were not well versed toward helping the student. The findings here also found some the interviewees had trusting relationships with the advisors.

### **Conclusion**

The focus in this study was male attrition and retention at college or university institutions. For four decades, male students' attendance has been on a downward trend within the higher education (Conger & Long, 2010; Wells et al., 2011) and the answer to this dilemma will not be answered in this research or this study. In this dissertation I analyzed what researchers have found regarding male higher education students' attrition

and retention. With this study I wanted to find out what male students who have left the institution felt about their experiences and if would they voice those experiences in an interview setting. Eight male students did vocalize their feelings about the faculty, advisors, administrators, and their feelings about the experience as they attended the community college.

What becomes of this research study? Will it become a stepping stone to further research? Will male students at some point have attendance parity with the female students? Recommendations, included in the recommendation section, are practices that if properly researched will provide positive social change to many of the college experiences found and experienced by the participants. An overlap between several recommendations can answer some of the concerns expressed in this study. Do academics bring positive social change for our society when half of the population does not participate fully? Only time will tell if this study gains support, a movement to bring more men into higher education and keep men who graduate in the higher education system. As I stated earlier, this study is not the final word on retention and attrition in higher education but encouraging men to return to higher education is but a step toward that end.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Research Question 1: How do men describe their experiences leading to the decision to discontinue their community college education?

Research Question 2: What supports do men perceive colleges could offer to support in their decision to continue postsecondary education?

1. What led you to apply to a higher education institution?
2. What would you tell others about your experience in higher education, especially administrators, faculty, and other students?
3. What factors led to your departure from higher education? Be explicit and detailed in your answer.

Probes:

- Were there distractions you were facing within the school system? In the classroom, outside the classroom, and/or elsewhere? If so, what were they?
- How prepared do you think you were for the college experience?
- Did you face challenges managing your time, efforts, and freedom?
- Were there financial concerns coming to higher education?
- Did you feel confident that your monetary needs were available to you?
- Had you explored scholarships, grants and other financial awards available to you?
- Did you have support from your immediate family supporting your decision to attend higher education? If so, tell me more.

- Did you leave college for a job where monetary rewards were more attractive than the classroom? Can you tell me more about that aspect of your choice?
4. Did an advisor or someone else from the college reach out to you about an exit interview or talk with you about your decision to leave? Can you share with me what you told them?
  5. Are there any ways that you feel being a male influenced your educational experience? In K-12? in higher education? In classrooms? On campus in general? From administrators?

#### Probes

- Did you experience any differences in which the faculty treated men and women that you could describe for me?
  - Did you have any experiences of alienation or discrimination?
1. Are there ways the campus could have focused your education and developed programs for your success?
  2. Can you tell me about your perceptions of campus efforts to create a climate of success?
  3. Have you considered applying to finish a degree program? What would support you to do so?
  4. As a concluding statement, what can the higher education system do to keep males enrolled and eventually obtain a degree?
  5. Is there anything I didn't ask that you would like to contribute to the interview?