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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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Perceptions of Race, Status, and Instructional Modality as Predictors of Degree Attainment for
African American Male Community College Students

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Roderick C. Lewis, Sr.

April 2022

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the young men whose counterstories form the foundation of this study. I further dedicate this study to the students that this effort was intended to assist and to the college administrators and support staff charged with developing innovative solutions to increase African American male persistence and degree attainment. I pray that the data contained within these pages stir solution-querying discussions.

I would also like to dedicate this work to Momma and Daddy. The memories of you will forever guide and strengthen me. You instilled in me such values as compassion, faith, dedication, and a strong work ethic. You taught me to be grateful for the things that I had and that ANYTHING could be divided and shared. I will forever love you and hold you dear in my heart.

My final dedication is to my remarkable wife Bernadette. Baby, you mean the world to me. You pushed, pulled, and prodded me throughout my dissertation journey, and your continual reminder that “if it were easy, then anyone could do it” gave me the strength and helped me steadfastly focus on the light at the end of the tunnel. You are indeed one in a million, my best friend, and every day I thank God for making you a part of my life.

Acknowledgments

May the Lord watch, between me and thee, while we are absent, from one another, and this we say, in Jesus's name, Amen. This paraphrase of Genesis 31:49 was the closing congregational prayer of a small Pentecostal church in my hometown of Mobile, Alabama, in the neighborhood of Maysville. I mention it because God has assigned so many, many people to watch over me during my journey toward a doctorate. Thank you to my family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances, who whispered words of support when I needed it most. WE made it!

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Abstract

Given the large number of students who begin their college education yet never graduate, it is essential that, as higher education leaders and policymakers develop student success strategies, they consider the persistence and degree attainment dynamics of all populations. This study focuses on the problem of degree attainment from the perspective of male, second-year, African American, community college students. A qualitative narrative case study approach was used to ascertain their perception of race, status attainment, and instructional learning modalities as predictors of degree attainment. Accordingly, those perceptions were then evaluated to determine their utility as predictors of degree attainment. Six students were recruited via electronically distributed flyers and participated in semistructured interviews via Zoom. The research questions focused on these students' perceptions of learning modalities and additional supports offered at their community college, how status attainment impacted their academic persistence, and what these male, second-year, African American, community college students perceived as institutional barriers to degree attainment. The data were hand-coded and revealed 11 emergent themes. The emergent themes were further analyzed using NVivo, revealing three primary themes categorized as follows: (a) Representation, (b) Support and (c) Race. The findings revealed that in as much as the research participants embraced the challenges within their learning environment, they perceived the need for additional support services, which they felt would contribute to retention and eventual degree attainment. Moreover, the findings also revealed that while the student generally did not experience overt racism, they still perceived institutional barriers to degree attainment grounded in implicitly biased interactions on campus. Accordingly, the perceived biases influenced these students' perception of status as it relates to a student's perception of self and how others view him, and also a perception of self within the

context of economic and social status. Hence, this study discusses these findings and provides new insights into predictors of academic persistence and degree attainment of African American, male, community college students.

Keywords: Achievement gap, community college, degree attainment, first time in college (FTIC), persistence, race

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Higher education leaders are responsible for addressing students' needs while ensuring their institution remains academically and economically viable (Gilbert & Heller, 2013; Palmadessa, 2017). Within those parameters, U.S. educational leaders have begun to explore different methods of enhancing student success (Horn et al., 2006; Urias et al., 2015). Administrators that link faculty pedagogy to student outcomes (Khoule et al., 2015) are incorporating the students' social capital (cultural backgrounds and life experiences) to enhance retention (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014). We notice that marginalized groups routinely do not benefit from practical, equitable, and inclusive educational resources (Stambaugh & Ford, 2015). Moreover, racial inequity in the U.S. higher education system is linked to the inefficiencies of institutional financial aid programs and the underfunding of aid to marginalized student populations (Student ARC, 2020); these miscalculations are barriers to student learning and negatively impact students' retention rates (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2019). Accordingly, DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2019) speculated that considerations of race, racism, and power, in and out of the classroom, have significant value regarding equitable academic achievement and the professional development of teachers and educational leaders.

African American male college persistence rates are the lowest (Johnson, 2013; Wood & Palmer, 2013). That notwithstanding, the documented achievement gaps between African Americans and their White counterparts do not alone justify this analysis. As propounded by Hill (2017), there is a need to present a less sanitized interpretation of the African American males' view and strive to advance a public memory that is informed, undisrupted, and properly articulated. This phenomenon of learning disparities along racial lines is well-documented (U.S. Department of Education, 2011) and is proven to adversely impact higher education graduation

rates of this systematically underserved population. Harper (2013) insisted that the low percentage of African American men attaining baccalaureate degrees is among the most pressing and complex issues in U.S. higher education. Given the large numbers of students who begin their college education yet never graduate, student persistence goals are now woven into the strategic plans of academic advisors, student counselors, and policymakers (Horn et al., 2006). Moreover, community college educators are challenged to support disadvantaged students who face culturally different social and academic readiness issues when transitioning from two-year colleges to four-year institutions (Wilson, 2014).

Scholars are advancing several reasons why African American males struggle toward degree attainment in higher education; among the most notable is that African American college males enter college academically unprepared (Jones, 2019; Wolff et al., 2014). Conversely, Delpit (2013) theorized that administrators should discredit deficit theories as justification for low student achievement. Similarly, Thompson (2004) regarded deficit theories as crutches of ignorance by those not attuned to the socioeconomic, institutional injustices of growing up African American. Further, Thompson (2004) added that deficit theories should be tossed aside, and academia now ought to favor instructional modalities of which efficacy studies report a measurably positive impact on African American male students' persistence.

Efforts to assess connections between race and learning have long challenged college administrators and learning disparities along racial lines are well-documented within several theoretical frameworks. One of these frameworks is the critical race theory (CRT). CRT looks at critical issues of racial justice, equity, and access in the field of education (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019). The critical race theory is the theoretical framework of this research study.

Statement of the Problem

This study focused on the problem of African American male degree attainment from the perspective of second-year African American male community college students (AAMCCSs). Given the large number of students who begin their college education yet never graduate, higher education leaders and policymakers now realize that incorporating plans for the African American male student's persistence is integral to their school's long-term viability (Horn et al., 2006). Moreover, Harper (2013) insisted that African American men's low percentage of attaining baccalaureate degrees is among the most pressing and complex issues in American education and warrants a more in-depth investigation. Nevertheless, limited literature explores how race, status attainment, and instructional learning modalities have utility as predictors of degree attainment of AAMCCSs.

Additionally, the phenomenon of African American male degree attainment has not been analyzed from the second-year community college student's perspective. The study of second-year AAMCCSs and their journey to degree attainment is vital because often, even if inadvertently, society fails to recognize the individuality of the African American male. Subsequently, social conditioning overrides reality's optics, and unsubstantiated stereotyping prevails (Allen, 2011). Kuh (2009) questioned if colleges and universities were effectively using their resources to introduce proactive and innovative measures that increase students' success from diverse backgrounds. In that same vein, the need exists to investigate how community colleges might reprogram curriculum models to consider the African American male students preferred instructional learning modalities. As much as there has been a proliferation of initiatives focusing on retention, degree attainment, and transfer of men of color (Harris et al., 2015), there is limited literature addressing African American male degree attainment through

the lens of instructional learning. I believe that further analysis is warranted that explores how second-year, AAMCCSs perceive the effectiveness of existing instructional learning modalities; and how might the information gathered be used as an avenue of research to address the gap in their achievement (Beemer et al., 2018; Harper, 2015). Documenting the observations of this population's lived experiences provides additional substance to the contention that further study is warranted to discover the predictors of degree attainment of AAMCCSs and assess if race, status attainment, and instructional learning modalities play a role degree attainment.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative narrative case study explored how AAMCCSs perceive their race, social status attainment, and impact of instructional learning modalities within their college setting. Accordingly, those perceptions were then evaluated to determine their utility as predictors of degree attainment. In that same vein, this chapter introduced the academic journey of these students and discusses their path to degree attainment. This chapter's context includes the views presented by this group of students, specifically, the discussions centering on those students in their second year of study. This population was selected because, anecdotally speaking, the second-year students are "experienced" and possess the perceptions of persistence and perseverance pivotal to conduct this higher education study.

Another aspect of this analysis is to document their views and experiences concerning their interactions with their counselors, advisors, and department administrators. Higher education leaders require innovative and progressive tools to support the degree attainment of AAMCCSs. The intent of this review is to provide U.S. higher education leaders with additional options to address disparities in equitable access to higher learning; and to provide tools that promote advances in bridging the gap in African American male community college student's

graduation attainment rates and are aligned with what the colleges' focus of addressing the economic development and future employment needs of the community. Treuhaft et al. (2014) reported that college completion among racial minorities is essential to the U.S. economy.

Another goal is to provide administrators with innovative learning options for African American males; and, in turn, stem the tide of African American male students' low degree attainment rates at the two- and four-year college level. This is important because 11.5% of African American male students depart from a community college within one year of admission, 48.9% leave after three years, and 83% leave after six years, all without achieving their intended certificate or degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Research Approach

This qualitative inquiry made distinctions based on narrative case study methods by capturing the essence of experiences lived by AAMCCSs. The goal was to focus on the lived experiences of African American males attending one or more rural community colleges located in a Texas region referred to as the "Crossroads," named because of its geographical proximity to Corpus Christi, Houston, and San Antonio, Texas. I selected this region because I reside in a Crossroads cities, and one of the college under review is an educational pillar of my community. Accordingly, this school's 5% representative African American male population mirrors the city's demographics (M. Wiley, personal communications, September 4, 2020). Hence, it is reasonable to question if increasing the African American male degree attainment rates might, in turn, perpetuate improvement in the socioeconomic status of the African American males in this community.

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) was the theoretical framework that guided this study. CRT is a culmination of works presented by Derrick Bell, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado that examined U.S. law through the lens of race (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019). Accordingly, Martinez (2014) explained that CRT is a framework that examines how race implicitly and explicitly impacts social structures; and, it challenges institutionalized acceptance of injustices to racial minorities. This framework was used to explore additional questions of student engagement: to study how community colleges can engage with high schools and community college students to improve the transition, persistence, and the eventual perseverance to graduation of African American males.

Research Questions

To capture the essence of experiences of AAMCCSs, this qualitative narrative inquiry distinguished between various factors that may influence African American male community college student degree attainment. Delgado and Stefanci (2016) argued that gathering experiences from racial minorities as obtaining the voices of color.

To better understand the role of U.S. higher education leaders and how they address disparities in the equitable access to higher learning; and, to provide tools that promote advances in bridging the gap in African American male community college student's graduation attainment rates, the following research questions serve as a roadmap for this study:

RQ1: What learning modalities and additional support measures give the second-year African American male community college student the most significant opportunity for degree attainment?

RQ2: How does status attainment impact the academic persistence of second-year African American male community college students?

RQ3: What do second-year African American male community college students perceive as institutional barriers to degree attainment?

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms were used in this study:

Achievement gap. The academic performance disparity between groups of students. (Bernstein, et al., 2014).

Community college. Two-year institutions of higher learning also referred to as junior colleges that provide a pathway into the workforce or afford students the opportunity to transfer their credits toward a four-year degree. (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018).

Deficit theory. A theoretical belief that marginalized, socioeconomically challenged students are predestined to underachieve due to the cultural surroundings. (Harper, 2010).

Degree attainment. Completing a two-year community college and obtaining an associate degree. (Hill, 2017)

Disadvantaged student. Students who went from underperforming high schools directly into public institutions of higher learning (Straus, 2020).

Doubly disadvantaged student. Students who went from underperforming high schools directly into private institutions of higher learning (Straus, 2020).

First time in college (FTIC). The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) defines a first time in college student as one who will attend college for the first time, excluding dual credit work. (THECB, 2019)

Race. Ethnicity as categorized by either American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black, or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and White (Park & Liang, 2020).

Retention. Students' continued enrollment and attendance each term until graduating or transferring to another institution and continuing towards degree completion. (Tinto, 1993).

Second-year students. African American male students who have completed the prerequisite to advance in their program of study within their first-year of study. (Horn et al., 2006)

Underprepared students. High school graduates who enter college requiring remedial courses as prerequisites for college-level courses (Bernstein et al., 2014).

Summary

I designed this qualitative study to explore the connections between race, status, and instructional learning modalities that support or detract from AAMCCSs' degree attainment. Framed around the perspectives presented by second-year community college students, this chapter highlights the need for innovative and progressive tools to support degree attainment of AAMCCSs. Chapter 2 provides an overview of published literature that elaborates on the need for this study based on past research of African American male student degree attainment based on the pillars of CRT, status attainment, and discussions on the efficacy of varying instructional learning approaches.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative narrative case study was to explore how AAMCCSs perceive their race, social status attainment, and impact of instructional learning modalities within their college setting. Accordingly, those perceptions were then evaluated to determine their utility as predictors of degree attainment. Hypothesizing that the second-year students likely had experienced situations critical to this research and that they would be able to articulate the necessary skills to persist and persevere having completed that pivotal first year of higher education study, this investigation captured the academic journey of these second-year students by assessing their perceived first-year successes and academic challenges. This researcher further strove to gather data that provides assistance to community colleges in bridging the gap of systematic inequity that limits the African American male students' access to and successful degree attainment in community colleges. The scope and structure of the following literature review examine whether a single or multimodal learning method and additional support measures give the second-year AAMCCSs the most significant opportunity for degree attainment, how status attainment impacts their academic persistence, and what do AAMCCSs perceive as institutional barriers to degree attainment.

In this section, I review literature that addresses how scholars have framed the challenges of AAMCCSs' perceptions of institutional barriers to degree attainment, and how aspects of status attainment impact their degree attainment. In addition, this chapter highlights learning modalities and their impact on AAMCCSs' degree attainment. Within the context of CRT, this section reviews related literature on race, status attainment, and the efficacy of instructional learning approaches on the degree attainment of second-year AAMCCSs.

Literature Search Method

The literature search primarily entailed using Abilene Christian University's (ACU) library resources, the Google Scholar Online search engine, and the EBSCOhost and Texas Higher Education Accountability System research databases. The searches were broad in scope using a myriad of Boolean combinations. Keywords, terms, and phrases used to contribute to this study were *African American male students, higher education, degree completion, college-readiness, remedial education, student retention, Black male students, student persistence, race, achievement gap, underachievement, educational attainment and academic success, community college and two-year college, student success, barriers of African American students, and degree attainment.*

Critical Race Theory

Some conceptual frameworks offer different, yet not wholly opposing viewpoints, to CRT. For instance, Harper (2010) propounded the anti-deficit framework and insisted that the African American male's circumstances should not be marginalized as merely a product of cultural, socioeconomic disadvantages. Nevertheless, the literature on persistence in community colleges and how these institutions might combine efforts with four-year institutions point to a strong likelihood that academia might succeed in overcoming the retention and perseverance dilemma facing higher education. Many other scholars contributed to this scholarly movement of using CRT in conceptual and theoretical contexts for studying concerns of retention and attainment for students of color in higher education (Torres, 2013). Other recognized scholars studying race and racism are Robert M. Cover, A. Leon Higginbotham, Derrick Bell, and Alan D. Freeman. While each author offers a slightly differentiated viewpoint of the African American males' journey, their basic approach echoes the five generally accepted CRT tenets:

1. Centrality of race and racism U.S. society;
2. Commitment to social justice;
3. Challenge to dominant ideologies;
4. Experiential knowledge; and
5. Interdisciplinary. (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019)

The progress of African American males, as measured within the prism of academics, intercultural communications, and the “undercover existence” of racism has historically been balanced upon the scales of social justice and equity; however, Seider et al. (2019) exclaimed that the relationship between African American males’ belief in the causes of poverty explored in combination with their awareness of racism requires additional study. Within this context, CRT serves as the framework of this study, because its tenets most closely mirror the challenges of African American male’s in U.S. society (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019). While this analysis focuses on Bell and Freeman (e.g., institutional racism, interest convergence, etc.) as discussed by Torres (2013), other scholars offer contrasting perspectives of the CRT. For instance, Graham et al. (2011) advanced six tenets, noting that race in society is central, not a peripheral afterthought. Similarly, Niculescu et al. (2015) held that interculturality highlights aspects related to the concept of intercultural education and communication, thus establishing a connection to racial and educational inequities. Last, challenging the dominant ideology requires that relations between material reality and ideas that perpetuate decision making that excludes non-Whites (Majors, 2019) are not socially or culturally accepted. The fundamental CRT tenets used for analysis in this research are (a) the centrality of race, (b) intersectionality, and (c) challenge to dominant ideology.

The Centrality of Race and Racism

Whether we choose to minimize or eradicate the centrality of race and racism in America, the first step is to recognize that the problem exists (Wood, 2011). Recently, CRT's scholarly views supposed that the focus of its tenets should reflect more on a problem-posing, solution querying event and start to disengage from a White supremacist research questioning approach (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019). The use of a problem-posing approach, as described by Lynn and Jennings (2009), helps shape research more apt to help educators develop essential understandings about the supporting factors for the efficacy of race and education in African American male development. Of course, this study respects the values expressed by previous scholars in their literary work and efforts that courageously outlined inalienability and Whiteness as an object of control (Caldwell, 1996). Nevertheless, this new problem-posing approach opens a vast array of new perspectives on how the centrality of race and racism tenet of CRT might be investigated in a review of racism's permanency in American life. Palmadessa (2017) posited that President Obama's American Graduation Initiative and the president's America's College Promise are two initiatives aimed at assisting first-time-in-college (FTIC), disadvantaged, and doubly disadvantaged students, groups which consist of underserved individuals, who are often African American male students.

Furthermore, Palmadessa (2017) held that focusing on higher education as contextualized within the realm of the centrality of race and racism underscores the secondary and tertiary impacts on the nation's economy. Similarly, the systemic inefficiency of community colleges in facilitating degree attainment of African American males is parallel to the implicit biases of American society (Harper, 2014; Lynn & Jennings, 2009; Urias et al., 2016). Conversely, in this era of heightened racial injustices in America, a new term, White fragility, has surfaced to

explain how White people respond with anger and defensiveness during conversations on racism (DiAngelo, 2020). For example, Gilbert and Heller (2013) expressed the following when asking about educational opportunities:

The language here is quite clear; it evokes the relationship between investments in higher education and economic development. But it also emphasizes the risk to equity and opportunity of continuing a system where the economic status of a student and her family is the critical factor in determining whether she goes to college. Furthermore, the nation was depriving itself of a vast pool of potential leaders and socially competent citizens by allowing access based on economic status to be perpetuated. (p. 418)

Interdisciplinary

CRT evolved from a counterculture of scholars who sought to disprove the traditional legal premise that all men are treated equally, and that justice is blind; CRT challenges this legal “truth” by advancing liberalism and meritocracy as conduits for self-interest, power, and privilege (Critical Race as a Methodology, 2015). In reflection, the rich also opine about brushes with meritocracy and poverty during their ascent to wealth, power, and privilege. The interdisciplinary theory expounded by Solórzano and Yosso (2002) seemed to fit the purpose of this research; they contended that an interdisciplinary knowledge base draws from “ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, history, humanities, and law to develop an enhanced understanding of students of color’s experiences in higher education” (p. 24). Moreover, the literature suggests that the interdisciplinary tenet should prove impactful in addressing the research questions posed in this study of African American males in their second-year of junior college, especially considering the cross-cultural nature of U.S. higher education environments (Niculescu et al., 2015; Wood & Harris, 2017; Wood et al., 2015).

CRT and its interdisciplinary closely relate to the study of African American males in community college because college is acutely a social environment, with formal and informal organizations; these organizations form the foundation of the students' social development (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019). Acceptance into a different set of societal norms, feelings of self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging are all interdisciplinary identity functions that impact the AAMCCSs' rates of persistence, attrition, and eventual degree attainment (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Similarly, Wood and Williams (2013) held that it is also important that educators are cognizant of the transition the AAMCCS is experiencing. As noted by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), when there is a scholarly and administrative focus on personal narratives and experiential knowledge, the underrepresented people can name their reality.

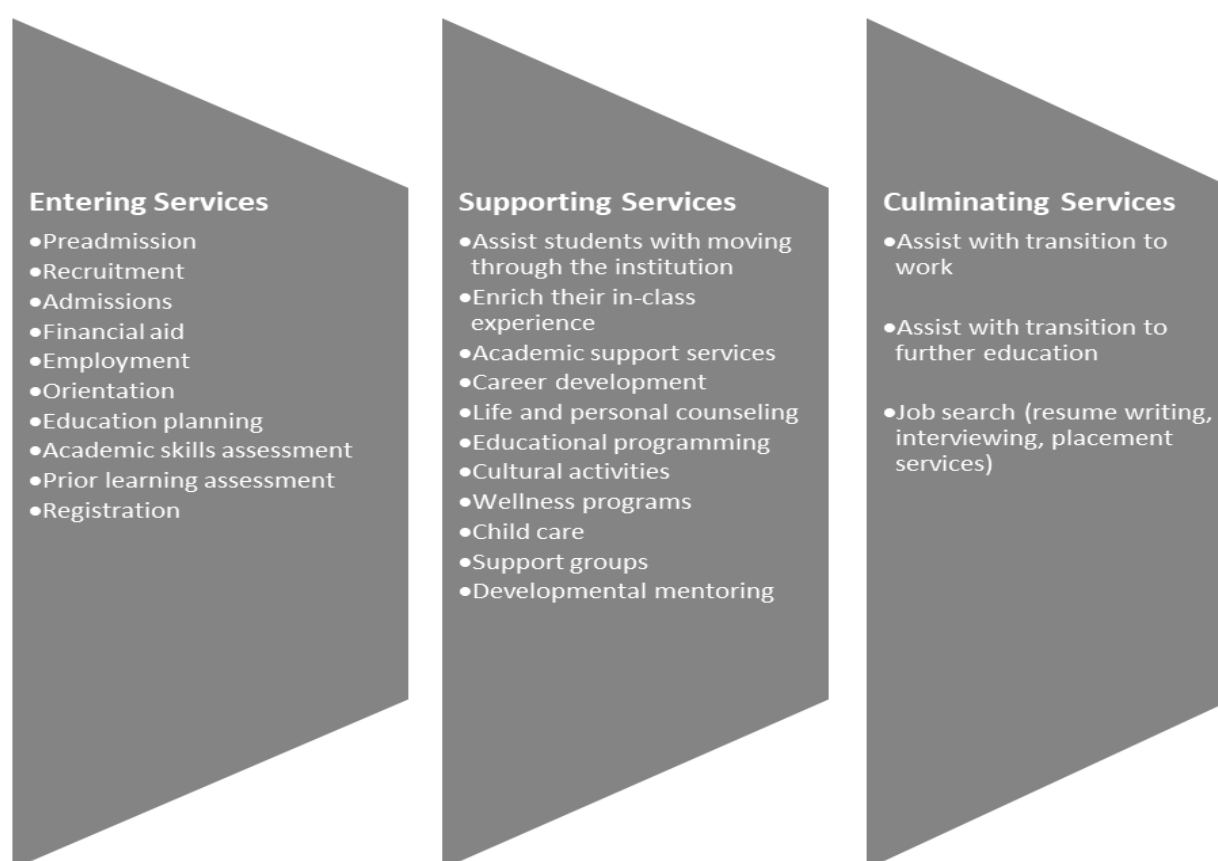
The Challenge to Ideologies

Researchers who assume to influence African American male students' academic outcomes by advancing the theoretical framework of CRT also accept the responsibility to challenge the claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy in society (Critical Race as a Methodology, 2015). In line with the aforementioned tenet concerning the challenge to ideologies, a similar perspective, furthered by Ladson-Billings (2013), is that the critical race scholar must work rigorously and recognize their requirement to identify the endemic racism in schools and colleges. Within the realm of CRT, all ideologies are open to challenge and change should the situation warrant it. This review seeks to challenge how AAMCCSs are seen within their academic culture; then, to determine if those observations paint a fair picture of this group of students' needs, wants, and desires regarding degree attainment and the assistance they expect to receive. Whereas this report is theoretically grounded in CRT, the discussion of the tenet concerning challenges to ideologies also examines how these African

American males perceived student services and supports. Chickering and Reisser (1993) recommended “viewing student development programs and services from the student’s point of view” (p. 438). Accordingly, this study utilizes the three service cluster models (see Figure 1), introduced by Schlossberg et al. (1989), to illustrate the service and support perceptions of these African American males and explain how CRT intersected with student services and supports.

Figure 1

Chickering and Reiser’s Three Service Cluster



Why does the challenge to dominant ideologies matter on college campuses; and more specifically, what is the significance of this CRT tenet in the study of African American male degree attainment? As discussed earlier in this study, the community college is the place where the community leaders build partnerships with collegiate administrators to strategically project

the economic needs and matching skill set required for those future positions. Allen (2011) articulated that individual differences matter for communications to be successful and social identity to thrive. Therefore, community, higher education leaders, and policymakers are encouraged to implement strategic plans for the success of the African American male student. Their persistence is integral to the school's long-term viability and to the equitable support of the members of its community (Horn et al., 2006).

Persistence, Attainment, and Perseverance

There are many reasons to embark on a study of persistence, attainment, and perseverance predictors for African American males in community college. First, most studies on Black men in postsecondary education have overlooked the community college context (Wood & Williams, 2013). The local community college is of significance because 54.9% of African American male high school students seek out postsecondary opportunities at two-year institutions. The vast majority of these two-year college attendees (81.9%) enroll in public two-year colleges, referred to as community colleges (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Wood and Palmer (2013) found that African American males have significantly lower academic preparation in foreign languages, mathematics, and science than their collegiate counterparts. For decades researchers have explored the problem of persistence and lack of attainment for African American males and other underserved ethnic minorities, leading one to believe that there is a need to "level" the field; to take courses of action that do not accept the notion that this demographic (i.e., African American males) is predestined to underachieve.

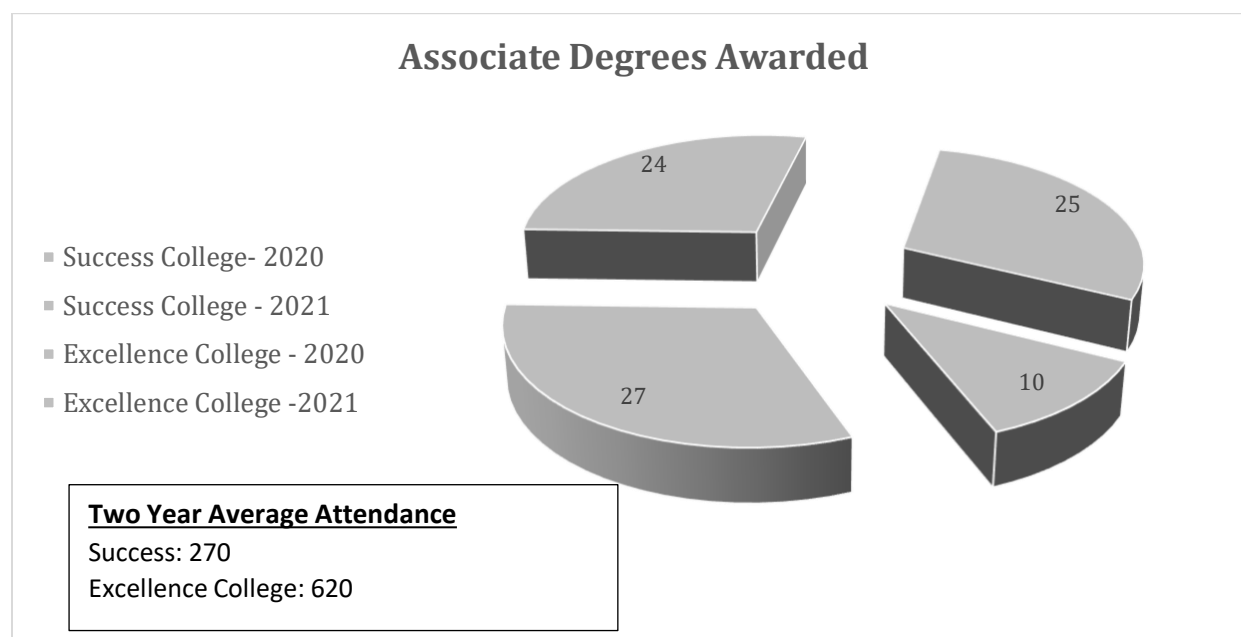
Tinto (1993) posited that some external factors or variables have a significant influence on student persistence. These external factors include family responsibilities, work, community responsibilities, and state and local organizations' actions. Similarly, familial environments,

academic preparedness, and socioenvironmental variables exert a strong positive influence over African American male college perseverance (Wood & Williams, 2013). Examining one's social and racial agency (perception of empowerment) also holds value when attempting to predict student persistence and eventual perseverance (Cole, 2021). This is important because an individual's perception of agency, in the larger context, could be used as a gauge to predict will, persistence, engagement, and most importantly—attainment (Galliot & Graham, 2014). These factors are discussed in Chapter 5.

Tinto's (1975) model of student attrition and retention and the self-determination theory asserted similar notions. Interestingly, the self-determination theory corroborates CRT in that an individual's social recognition leads to self-edification. However, the tenets of the CRT assert that race is a social construct that institutionally limits social acceptance (Wood & Palmer, 2013). Taking another view, Wood and Williams (2013) explored persistence variables in defining academic, social, and environmental domains. Notwithstanding the findings and assertions of the scholars mentioned earlier, CRT most closely provides a framework to address African American male attainment, persistence, and perseverance. Figure 2 illustrates degree completion at the colleges represented in this study, and highlights the limited number of degrees conferred in comparison to the total population of this student demographic.

Figure 2

Associate Degrees Awarded at Participants' Colleges (THECB Accountability System)



Note. Success College and Excellence College are pseudonyms for the community colleges the participants attended; THECB = Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Proper understanding and implementation of all tenets of CRT should help researchers successfully influence African American male students' intellectual, social, political, economic, and spiritual objectives (Wood & Palmer, 2013).

Status Attainment

Whereas CRT serves as the initial framework and roadmap to investigate the experiences of African American male students in community colleges, the perspective of attainment is multifaceted and goes beyond discussions on the influences of the social, cultural, and behavioral anomalies experienced by the African American male (Torres et al., 2009; Wood & Williams, 2013). Moreover, in exploring the provision of academic experiences, Mau (1995) held that status attainment (one's position in society or class) also shapes African American

males' educational expectations. According to Damian et al. (2015), there are correlations between personality traits and cognitive ability that help surmise educational, income, and occupational attainment.

Albert Bandura (1977) in *Social Learning Theory* explained that human behavior, and by extension one's belief in self, is a product of observation. Bandura argued that each person is an agent of change, fully participating in and influencing his surroundings. Furthermore, Mirowsky and Ross (2003) held that education serves as a status compensating factor in terms of one's ability to plan and engage in goal-directed behavior, both critical factors for status attainment and self-efficacy. Status attainment is also useful in focusing on the interpersonal relationship between educator and student. Buchanan (2006) expressed that biased social strata are developed in the classroom. Similarly, within the scope of this analysis, conversations involving status relate to a student's perception of self, perception of how others view him, and perception of self within the context of economic and social status.

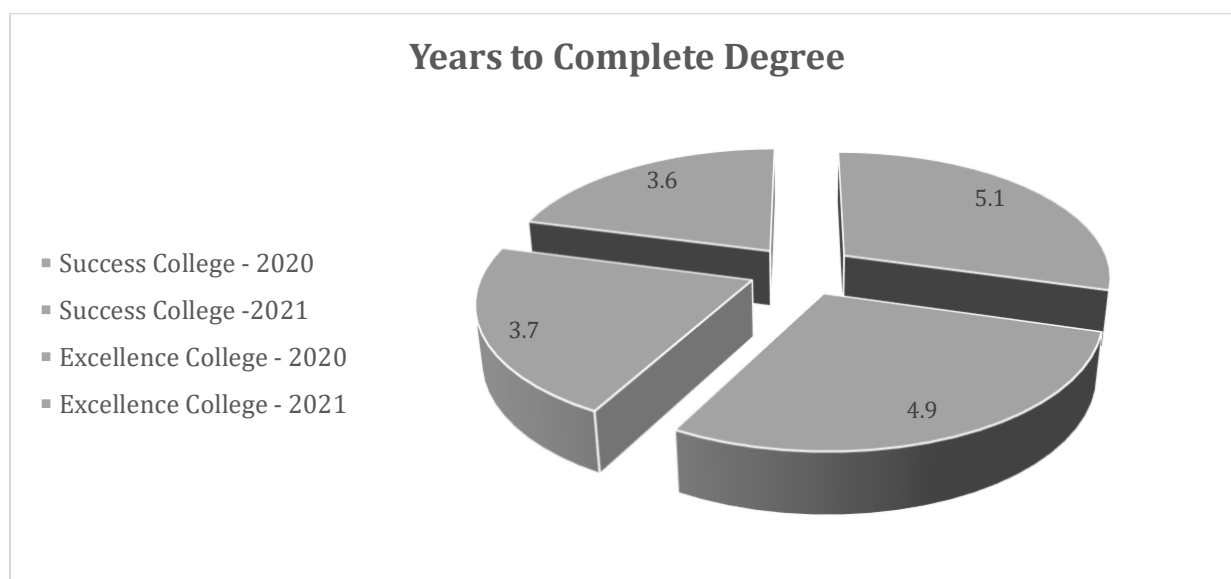
Community College Completion

This study considers the community colleges as stakeholders; Chen (2015) pinpointed that evaluations must provide information that helps stakeholders first know whether their program is reaching the target group—African American males—before treatments/interventions are implemented to improve outcomes. Harper (2010) expressed that the scholarly community has experienced a rise in research articles and books that report the efficacy of postsecondary education programs that move toward African American male success agendas. Wood and Harris (2017) surmised that in addition to the collegiate environment, advocacy of African American support initiatives has also begun to transcend the healthcare field, social sciences, and the criminal justice system. According to Wood and Harris (2017), “It has become commonplace to

see colleges host symposia, conferences, and convenings, as well as to implement initiatives and programs designed to serve this population” (p. 1). Research within the framework of the community college system is essential given that 71% of Black and Latino men start their postsecondary journey by enrolling in their local community college (Harrison & Palacios, 2014). Regarding the colleges in this study, the THECB (2021) reported that the average associate degree completion period for African American males was greater than 3.5 years (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Years to Complete Degree at Participants' Colleges



Teaching Men of Color

The role of community colleges in African American male degree completion is to provide supportive educational instruments that foster resilience, that offer a means to overcome barriers to success, and most importantly, redefine how development education factors into the students' degree attainment process (Harper, 2010; Ingram et al., 2016). Along those same lines, several scholars have opined that inadequate remediation among the socially marginalized and

non-college-ready student is oftentimes the singularly most impactful barrier to student persistence, perseverance, and degree attainment (Horn et al., 2006; Kinzie & Kuh, 2017; Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2017). Wood et al. (2015) declared that limited preparation for the rigors of collegiate study is not an indication of a student's lack of desire to succeed; in fact, their presence on campus is evidence of their resilience and willingness to persevere. In teaching men of color (i.e., African American males), another challenge to community colleges is evaluating how this group of students appraise available learning supports, perceive those supports as reliable, and accept that the available supports address their needs (Wood et al., 2015). Introspectively speaking, Davis (2017) stated in his letter to Black communities, "Watch for moments to support your child; we can't put the burden to ask on them" (p. 44).

Instructional Learning Modalities

The aspect of instructional learning should be critically observed to ensure that the needs of the African American male are being identified. According to Ragnanath and Priya (2015), noting that learning modalities are the sensory channel (i.e., to give, receive and store data) for students' information gathering; teaching styles must be tailored to the needs of the student. Some research has suggested that by restructuring instructional learning modalities, community colleges might flatten the curve and begin to demonstrate positive improvements in African American male college students' persistence, attainment, and perseverance to graduate. Several instructional learning modalities support how multimedia learning, pace, and varying students' cognitive load might be repurposed, perhaps in a manner that has the potential to positively affect the persistence, attainment, and perseverance of AAMCCSs (Izmiril & Kurt, 2016).

Izmiril and Kurt (2016) also submitted that student instruction should be learner-paced or system-paced and multimodal to enhance students' academic achievements. While this approach

offered no statistically significant change to learning, it did reveal how multimedia modalities increase students' cognitive activity. Interestingly, a study by Palacios and Wood (2016) showed that when comparing racial counterparts in terms of online versus face-to-face instruction, face-to-face students consistently scored higher, notwithstanding their racial affiliation. Hershkovitz and Nachmias (2011) reported positive results in online persistence in higher education web-supported courses; perhaps, this instructional instrument might improve African American male persistence, attainment, and perseverance to graduation. Another interesting point of their study was discovering a correlation between the volume of activity and trends of business concerning relation to student behavior; many students only visited the web support towards the end of the semester when exams, assignments submissions, and other deliverables are due.

On the other hand, self-directed learning and feedback source modality are two other instructional learning instruments that use a version of direct student feedback to influence academic competency (Eunjoo, 2015; Goldberg & Cannon-Bowers, 2015). These two approaches offer administrators another set of tools they might use to improve the attainment outcomes of African American males in community college. According to Eunjoo (2015), self-directed learning was found to influence class attitude, thus indirectly affecting learning outcomes. More importantly, the author points out that learning outcomes can be affected by the interrelationship between faculty and students.

This interrelationship aspect of self-directed learning ties back to the CRT; African American society seeks to challenge long-held academic teaching ideologies and emphasizes the benefits of the experiential knowledge gained by coordinated faculty-student relations. Similarly, Goldberg and Cannon-Bowers' (2015) feedback source modality demonstrated the utility of intellectual tutoring communications. Their experiments surmised that institutional leaders have

an opportunity to implement curricula that “autonomously generated explicit feedback within game-based training environments” (Goldberg & Cannon-Bowers, 2015, p. 2). Closely monitored, the influence on African American males’ performance via an autonomous interface and intellectual tutoring feedback has the potential to deliver explicit feedback in such environments.

Researchers from various disciplines have developed an optimal approach to student learning. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) speculated that professional development is the most effective tool for teachers; they felt that an engaged faculty leads to better prepared and thus more successful students. That, unfortunately, put the onus back on the teacher and the institution of higher learning to accept the CRT tenets and then to muster the willingness to implement African American male-centered instructional changes. Regulatory constraints, supported by races in place to inflict racism and social injustice, have slowed the evolution of instructional learning, but scholars persist.

The individual treatment effect on personal learning and self-paced learning (Beemer et al., 2018; Izmiril & Kurt, 2016) and Tishkovskoya and Lancaster’s (2012) suggestion to offer quantitatively based and fiscally prudent courses to larger populations of students present incremental methods of addressing the needs of AAMCCSs amid shrinking resources. However, many researchers take a bolder approach to instructional learning and feel that multi- and cross-modal instruction offer more options and appeal to students. For example, Manrique (2015) posited that face-to-face, web-based, and digital instruction were all used to measure the effectiveness of military training. Manrique’s (2015) research problem was whether there was “a statistically significant difference between students’ use of the three modes of instructional delivery (digital, face-to-face, and web-based instruction) and student course success and course

satisfaction” (p. 18). Manrique found that the need for online or digital modalities for tasks not requiring hands-on or practical application will continue to exist; therefore, a new dimension of research has presented itself. Further study is warranted to examine how varying shifts in instructional learning methods might impact AAMCCSs’ persistence.

Summary

To summarize, Chapter 2 consists of key elements of study regarding African American males: (a) an overview of CRT, its origins and philosophical theory; (b) a discussion of three CRT tenets that support the central theme of this study—the centrality of race and racism, interdisciplinary perspectives, and the challenge to dominant ideologies; (c) a review of persistence, attainment, and a reflection on the influence of status attainment on degree-seeking AAMCCSs and perseverance factors in community college; (d) an examination of the role of community colleges in degree completion; and (e) a discourse on the effectiveness of instructional learning modalities in improving community college degree completion rates.

Next, Chapter 3 discusses the methodology of this study, the research questions, design, and site selection, participant population and sample, data collection, materials, and instrumentation. The rest of the chapter addresses the analysis procedures, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and steps taken to protect participants, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations considered during the course of this research.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The purpose of the case study was to capture the perceptions of AAMCCSs as related to race, social status attainment, and instructional learning modalities to assess if those perceptions had utility as predictors of degree attainment. Accordingly, those perceptions were then evaluated to determine their utility as predictors of degree attainment. Yin (2014) upheld that qualitative study is suitable for research involving social science, and particularly useful when studying individual and organizational behavior. Similarly, Stake (1995) expressed the case study methodology as “the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi).

This chapter includes a review of the research questions, discussions of the research design, methodology, the research site, the research population, and sampling procedures. Furthermore, additional information is presented that explains the data collection and data analysis procedures, efforts to establish research validity, and the process to maintain trustworthiness. Chapter 3 concludes with a synopsis of my research assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and then a summary.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were designed to ascertain the experiences of AAMCCSs involved in community-college settings located in the Texas Crossroads region.

RQ1: What learning modalities and additional support measures give the second-year African American male community college student the most significant opportunity for degree attainment?

RQ2: How does status attainment impact the academic persistence of second-year African American male community college students?

RQ3: What do second-year African American male community college students perceive as institutional barriers to degree attainment?

Research Design

In this qualitative study, I used narrative analysis (see Appendix D) as a method of questioning to survey African American males in their second-year of community college to capture the essence of their lived experiences (Patton, 2015). The use of a qualitative research design affords the flexibility to tell a story based on personal observations of the subconscious, subtle, nuanced movements and gestures of the participants; through the voices of those whose human experience is most directly impacted and influenced (Fraenkel et al., 2019). Similarly, the goal of a narrative research method is to better understand the participants by presenting a story about lived experiences (Patton, 2015; Terrell, 2016). A qualitative narrative case analysis intentionally explores the potential to be educational (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). Accordingly, the interview questions are structured to elicit qualitative responses (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Qualitatively structured research questions get at the “how and why of the story” (Yates & Leggett, 2016, p. 225). I used additional support documents from the Texas Education Association (TEA), the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to compare current community college student data trends that are categorized by educational level, type of learning institution, geography, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. This rhetoric was useful in constructing interview questions and forming comparative analysis with other community colleges within the Crossroads region.

Context and Setting

Two rural community colleges of similar size were for this study. The pseudonyms Success College and Excellence County Junior College (ECJC) were employed for this research.

All community colleges were in cities located in the southeastern Texas region of the United States. Additionally, all the cities and community colleges are in a Texas region referred to as the Crossroads, named because of its geographically centered proximity to Corpus Christi, Houston, and San Antonio, Texas. I selected this area because of its proximity to my own community; this increased my availability should the possibility of in-person participant follow-up interviews become available. Additionally, these community colleges were selected because their total African American population surpasses 500 students (NCES, 2019); therefore, presenting a reasonable opportunity to obtain a sample range of 10–16 African American males in the second-year of community college. Whereas qualitative approaches favor smaller sample sizes (Leavy, 2017), a sample size of 10 sufficiently meets the purpose of this research (Lavrakas & Roller, 2015).

The population studied consisted of second-year AAMCCSs. The goal was to focus on the lived experiences of African American males who attend a community college in the Crossroads region of Texas. The sample population for this study included all second-year African American male community college students enrolled at the selected community colleges during the 2020-2021 academic term. Only second-year AAMCCSs who were degree-seeking students were considered for the study. Moreover, the perspectives gleaned from these students was likely to have a deeper impact given their experiential journey toward matriculating to their second-year.

Population

The population for this study included second-year AAMCCSs enrolled at selected rural community colleges during the 2020–2021 academic term. This group of second-year African American male students is also likely to have had significant interactions with academic

advisors, counselors, and department administrators during their first year of community college study and thus more likely to have in-depth and purposeful responses.

Sample

The sample was selected by purposeful sampling. Patton (2015) described purposeful sampling as identifying and selecting individuals or groups that are knowledgeable or have experience with the topic under investigation. Leavy (2017) described purposeful sampling as a strategy that seeks out the best cases (participants) most likely to address the research purpose and question(s); these research participants should have first-hand informed knowledge on the research questions under investigation. Only second-year AAMCCSs who were degree-seeking students; and, who were considered full-time (full academic course load designated by the community college curriculum) were considered for the study. Last, considering the average African American male student population at the community college in this study, the sample population goal of this research study ranged from eight to 10 participants.

Data Collection

Initially, I planned to recruit research participants and solicit the perspectives of my sample population through direct marketing with flyers and outreach to various campus components. My data collection strategy also included recruiting participants by using information flyers, which were to be posted in common areas (e.g., cafeteria, student and staff lounge areas, library, financial aid, and admissions offices) on the selected community college campuses located in a three-county Texas region referred to as the Crossroads. However, due to newly implemented COVID-19 protocols I was required to rethink my data collection strategy and shift to a more indirect means of reaching students. The Offices of Institutional Effectiveness at the respective community colleges direct-emailed my email solicitation (see Appendix B) and

informed consent to students matching my participant criteria: male, African American, attending community college, seeking a degree, and completion of first year of study. Also, to increase the likelihood of getting survey responses from my sample population, I obtained authorization from one of the colleges to electronically distribute recruitment flyers to specific campus departments, such as counseling and veteran’s affairs, and provide a \$50 Amazon gift card to those students selected to participate in the study. Ultimately, the study included two of the three Crossroads community colleges. Correspondingly, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and the two community colleges to assure anonymity. The participants are referred to as Barack, Langston, Sidney, Chadwick, Nelson, and Leon. The community colleges in this study are referred to as Success College and Excellence College. Table 1 graphically displays the demographics of the research participants in this study.

Table 1

Research Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Years to attain degree	Major	Work	Married	Military influence
Langston	25	7	General Studies	No	No	No
Leon	21	2.5	Pre-Nursing	No	No	No
Barack	47	1.5	Business Administration	FT	Yes	Yes
Sidney	23	3	Pre-Nursing	PT	No	No
Nelson	21	2	Business Administration	FT	No	No
Chadwick	39	3.5	Occupational Health and Safety	FT	Yes	Yes

Data collection consisted of semistructured in-person interviews with second-year AAMCCSs enrolled during the 2020–2021 academic year. To have a fruitful conversation, I followed a predeveloped set of questions (see Appendix D), commonly referred to as an

interview protocol. Patton (2015) stated: “An interview guide lists the questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview” and it ensures “that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed” (p. 438). Similarly, standardized questioning helps to develop clarity and increase the validity of the data collected (Terrel, 2016). However, interview guides are not restrictive to the point that they inhibit flexibility or limit the researcher opportunities to probe when necessary (Creswell, 2014; Leavy, 2017; Terrell, 2016).

Materials/Instruments

To safeguard against the spread of COVID-19, the participating colleges and ACU issued new social distancing guidelines directing that studies such as this narrative analysis be conducted virtually. Therefore, I conducted the interviews via Zoom, which was selected because of its popularity, ease of use, video recording function, and because it was available at no cost. In addition, Zoom is designed to secure data and protect individuals’ privacy. This was reflective of proper research protocol. Within the scope of CRT and the participants’ community college lived experiences, a guided interview format was used to query the participants. The interviews in this study were recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis involves the research’s meaning-making of collected information from research participants. Similarly, narrative data analysis aims to work within the scope of sometimes limited data to ascertain meaning-making about a population criterion (Patton, 2015). Yin (2014) asserted that data analysis is key to a successful research project. In a qualitative narrative research analysis, the data analysis process involved meticulously sifting through interview notes, coding observations, and transcribing interview video and notes. Patton (2015)

asserted though narrative inquiry might take a variety of forms; it lies with the researcher to produce a detailed biographical interview.

Each research participant was interviewed using Zoom and transcribed using Microsoft Word. The interview questions (see Appendix D) were phrased in standard open-ended interview format. Turner (2010) posited that open-ended inquiring allows the participant to contribute detailed information. The transcribed interviews were then manually coded based on Creswell's "codes on topics" (p. 198), using words and phrases based on past literature and common sense. The narrative data analysis process followed that proposed by Roberts (2010). First, I conducted an initial reading of all the video-recorded interview transcripts. This review led toward developing a list of categories and themes with each theme given an initial coding.

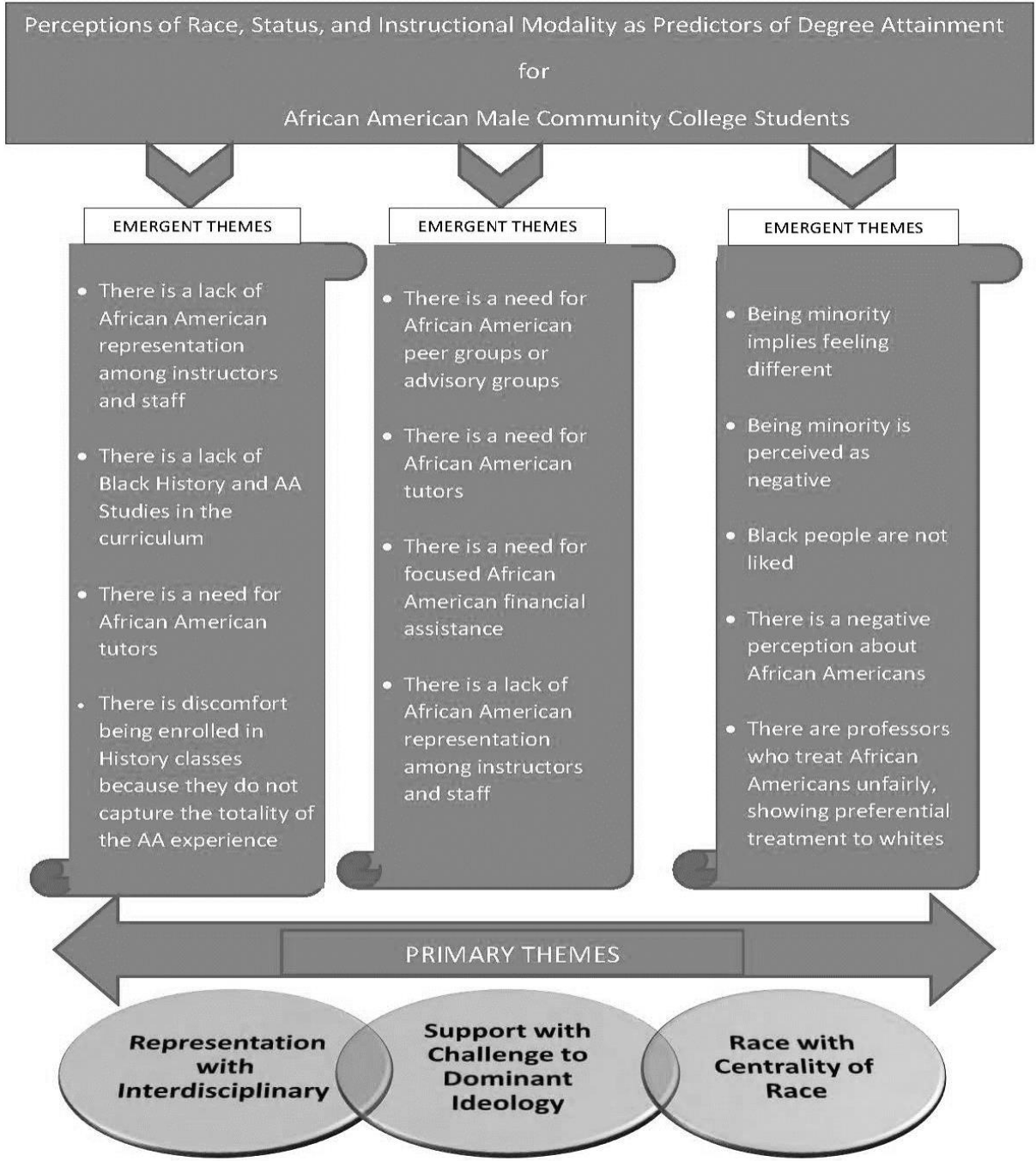
Next, I organized the responses, grouped them by the research question, categorized the responses by frequency, and developed a master coding list. Note, the interview protocol section with questions specifically related to race were created to establish a baseline for understanding the perspective of participants as male African American community college students. After developing a master coding list, each participant transcript was then coded, making note of when repeated references were made in a response category. The next step was to interpret the qualitative analysis to determine what message arose. These messages served as themes to use in the development of a framework for the analysis and structuring of the research participants' lived experience.

Last, I used NVivo, a software program used for qualitative and mixed methods research, to finetune my coding and trend analysis as well as provide another level of trustworthiness and validity. My narrative data analysis process followed that proposed by Roberts (2010). First, I conducted an initial reading of all the video-recorded interview transcripts. This review led

toward developing a list of categories and themes with each theme given an initial coding. Next, I compared the initial analysis to the groupings identified in NVivo, categorized the responses by frequency, and developed a master coding list. The final step was to interpret the qualitative analysis to determine what message arose. These messages served as themes to use in the development of a framework for the analysis and structuring of the research participants' lived experience. These themes, as illustrated in Figure 4, are discussed in detail in Chapter 5 to include recommendation on how they might serve as "positive facilitators of students' perception of faculty welcoming engagement" (Ingram & Coaxum, 2018, p. 6).

Figure 4

Emergent and Primary Themes



Ethical Considerations

The value system that guided this narrative case study emphasized adding a voice to the moral and social justice imperatives (Leavy, 2017) facing the African American male attending a community college. Terrell (2016) advanced three focus areas, such as informed consent, assessment of risk and benefit, and selection of subjects, as ethical foundations. This study recognized the relevance of cultural sensitivity during participant interactions, and which is intended to serve as a catalyst for positive social change (Leavy, 2017). Then, I applied to have the study approved by ACU's IRB and gain permission to research at the selected community college (see Appendix A). Last, the participants' names and the names of their colleges were replaced by pseudonyms to safeguard their identity and maintain confidentiality, as suggested by Ivankova (2015).

Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers often use the term trustworthiness when referring to validity (Roberts, 2010). This study implemented several strategies to ensure that data analysis was accurate to ensure integrity. For example, only those students who had completed a minimum of one year of community college were selected to participate. Additionally, strict adherence to the established interview protocol helped strengthen validity for the study through the uniformity of questioning. To help improve validity and credibility, I also engaged in member checking by returning interview data and researcher field notes to the students to check for accuracy, hence allowing for additional data clarification and validity. Creswell (2014) noted that there are other strategies for qualitative researchers, including clarifying researcher bias and providing a detailed, thick description. Creswell (2014) asserted that defining researcher bias is a valid technique for research verification.

Assumptions

Some assumptions arise during the development of any study. Assumptions are based on individual interpretations of history (lived or recorded) and must be taken into consideration and addressed to present objective data analyses. It was assumed that participants provided open and honest responses to the interview questions. This assumption was made because I planned to interview the participants in a private online setting where they would reasonably expect confidentiality. It was also assumed that the participants had personal experiences as second-year community college students consistent with the African American male experiences examined using CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). I also assumed that the sample of the African American male students was reasonably similar across all degrees pursued. Furthermore, I assumed the consistency of data relative to the research questions was achieved by providing the participants with identical initial interview questions and instructions. Last, it was assumed that the study would allow the transferability of the results to other similar cases of African American male students pursuing a community college degree.

Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic, a mysterious regionalized illness, has impacted how we interact worldwide. As it pertains to education and research, scholarly researchers are challenged to explore alternative means of collecting participant responses to research inquiries. Hence, a limitation of this study was that most data collection could not be conducted in-person. Additionally, COVID-19 social distancing and safety considerations was a limitation; much of this study was done online or via telephone. According to Terrell (2016), by assessing limitations, the researcher can consider and address threats to the validity of the study results. Additionally, depending on the number of participants, purposeful sampling of a small data

sample might also be a limitation of the study. In turn, there was a possibility that generalizations may not be applied to the broader community college community of African American male students.

Delimitations

Delimitations of this study include the following: (a) the community colleges as the location of the study, (b) focusing on second-year AAMCCSs, and (c) population size. De Chesnay (2017) propounded that delimitation is a deliberate decision to limit the population or the scope of the study. The community colleges were a delimiting factor because this study was based on interviews conducted at two local community colleges, close to my residence, within the Crossroads region of Texas. Also, narrowing the participant pool only to second-year AAMCCSs reduced the overall population of participants to draw from. Accordingly, purposefully setting the sample size at 10 students was another delimiting factor. Nevertheless, these constraints were significant to ensure that I obtained the unique perspectives of those students who matriculated past their first year of community college and have demonstrated the perseverance and drive toward degree attainment, which represents the cumulative essence of this research.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe how I conducted the study. This chapter highlighted the methodology, design, population, and sample of this study. From an educational perspective, findings from this research might present students and educators with additional options to improve persistence and degree attainment for this population. Therefore, I selected a qualitative narrative case study method to provide focus for interpreting the data; it honed in on the experiences of the second-year AAMCCSs and provided a voice to their lived experiences.

This chapter also discussed both the manual and NVivo analysis instruments that I used for data collection and how I used coding to analyze the data. I also mentioned certain aspects of ethical consideration related to participant protections. Last, assumptions, limitations, and research delimitations were presented. Chapter 4 outlines a detailed review of the findings.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of the study was to explore how second-year AAMCCSs perceived race, social status attainment, and instructional learning modalities within their college setting; and then to determine if those perceptions might be used as predictors of degree attainments. Chapter 4 begins with a study institution and a participant profile section that provides additional context regarding the participating colleges and research participant. Next, bound within the framework of CRT as discussed by DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2019) and Harper (2010), Chapter 4 aligns the research data, the analysis, and the emerging themes of the study with the perceptions of race, status, learning modalities, and race as expressed by the participants during the interview phase. During the initial data collection phase, I arranged and presented the interview questions in four sections—race, status, instructional modalities, and degree attainment—with each section designed to address one or more research question. This chapter presents the results of the data, which I coded twice, first by hand and then with NVivo. Whereas the initial coding revealed 11 emergent themes, recoding those themes using NVivo revealed three categories as the primary themes that connected to tenets of CRT: representation with interdisciplinary, support with challenge to dominant ideology, and race with centrality of race. These connections are detailed in the Chapter 5 discussion. Based on these primary themes, the results data are presented in four sections: (1) perceptions of instructional modalities, (2) perceptions of status attainment, (3) perceptions of degree attainment, and (4) perceptions of institutional barriers and race, which is reflective of the interview protocol; thus, allowing me to look at the critical issues investigated in segments that correspond with the research questions.

Study Institutions and Participant Profiles

Study Institutions

Success College (SC) is a large public community college with two primary campuses and one campus annex. It is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and offers Associate in Arts and Associate in Science degrees. SC enrollment is approximately 11,800 students, 4.9% African American. Additionally, SC offers academic and workforce certificate programs in more than 80 occupational fields. Accordingly, of the 23 African American males who graduated in 2020, the predominant areas of study were industrial technology and public service. Interestingly, over the past five years, only 2.5% of the 300+ faculty members have been African American. This statistic is reflective of the participants' desire for increased diversification of the faculty. Excellence County Junior College (ECJC) is also a public community college and is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. ECJC has one primary campus and three satellite campuses. In 1946 the school began with its first session of classes of approximately 200 students; its current enrollment is 6,128 with 12% African American (NCES, 2022). Last, the dean of student success shared that approximately 11% of ECJC's student population is African American (based on fall 2020 enrollment) and of that 11%, 47% are male. The dean also reported that 6% of African American male students graduate within two years and 40% transfer to a university (2018 cohort). Arguably, a 6% attainment rate supports the assumption that a need exists to seek predictors of degree attainment for AAMCCSs.

Participant Profiles

The profiles and interview narratives varied in depth and detail; this is reflective of the breadth of personal information the participant was willing to share. That notwithstanding, to achieve better overview of the participants, each participants was given time reflect and elaborate

on their comments and offered an opportunity to expand on the protocol questions. The characteristics of the six study participants, arranged in interview order, follows.

Barack. Barack was a 47-year-old student attending SC. He was a Business Administration major, married, and a U.S. Army veteran. Barack was a well-read, very articulate, and outspoken young man whose responses appeared to echo a lifetime of inequities. Barack reported that he was raised in the “deep south”; it was clear that his views and approach were still guided by reflection of a racially tainted environmental. Nevertheless, he remained highly motivated and determined to be a positive role model. Barack lamented, “What’s the use in complaining and putting another rock on the pile of ‘I can’t.’”

Langston. Langston, an unmarried General Studies major, attended ECJC. Langston was 25 years old and had been working on his associate degree for seven years. Langston still lived at home and noted that family was important to him. Therefore, Langston selected his community college because of its proximity to home. Langston appeared to be well-grounded and extremely cognizant of his academic environment and expressed an understanding of the financial, cultural, and academic dynamics facing his school administrators. Though he had not observed racism at school, he was concerned about the lack of diversity. Langston openly pondered, “Where’s the balance”?

Sidney. Sidney was a third-year Pre-Nursing major who worked part-time. He was also single with no military affiliations. Sidney was refreshingly naïve and his responses were devoid of self-imposed filters. His responses were also extremely short, requiring me to often rephrase the questions and ask probative follow-ups. Interestingly, Sidney noted that he had not observed racism yet felt that placement tests had a tendency of promulgating failure and negatively impacting student success.

Chadwick. Chadwick was pursuing a degree in Safety. He was 39 years old, married, and worked full-time. Chadwick graduated high school in 2000 and began community college in 2015; following a five-year break returning to SC in 2020. Chadwick admitted that his path toward degree attainment has not been a straight line, but he remained committed to attain his degree in 2021. Chadwick had a laid-back demeanor and indicated that race had not played a major part in his education or personal success. He stated that thanks to his father he could go to college for free, and that motivated him to persevere in appreciation for his father's military sacrifice. Chadwick said that when things get tough he remembered his father saying, "Don't fit the stereotype."

Nelson. Nelson, another Business Administration major, was 21 years old and worked full-time. Nelson expressed a substantial amount of support from his family. Nelson exhibited a true anti-deficit perspective and believed that it is up to the individual to overcome obstacles to academic success. He appeared highly motivated and completed his degree program in two years. At the time of the interview, Nelson has recently obtained his associate degree and had been admitted to a nearby four-year college.

Leon. Leon, a transfer from another community college two hours away, was a 21-year-old Pre-Nursing major. He was not employed and stated that his parents pay his tuition. Leon noted that he received a lot of support from his parents and stated that he owed it to them to succeed in college. Interestingly, Leon mentioned that he was placed on academic probation at the end of his first semester. He stated that that experience "was a wakeup call." At the time of this interview he was beginning his first semester at a prominent Texas nursing school.

Presentation of Data

This qualitative narrative analysis presents the experiences of six AAMCCSs. The purpose of the study was to explore how AAMCCSs perceive their race, social status attainment, and the impact of instructional learning modalities within their college setting. Accordingly, those perceptions were then evaluated to determine their utility as predictors of degree attainment. I also suppose that these predictors might serve as an attainment tool for college administrators as well as to help address the gap in research related retention and attainment of AAMCCSs (Suleman et al., 2019; Tolliver & Miller, 2018).

CRT was selected as the theoretical framework for this study. The tenets of CRT help to spotlight the progress of African American males, as measured through the prism of academics (Seider et al., 2019). Similarly, CRT serves as the framework of this study because its tenets—race and racism, social justice, the challenge to dominant ideologies, experiential knowledge, and interdisciplinary—most closely mirror the challenges of African American male’s society (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2011; Torres, 2013). CRT guided the formation of the research questions and was used to construct the interview protocol. Three research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What learning modalities and additional support measures give the second-year African American male community college student the most significant opportunity for degree attainment?

RQ2: How does status attainment impact the academic persistence of second-year African American male community college students?

RQ3: What do second-year African American male community college students perceive as institutional barriers to degree attainment?

Next, I gathered, analyzed, and synthesized the data from the interviews producing 11 emergent themes; I then recoded those themes using NVivo that revealed three primary themes. The data in the results section are presented based on its alignment with the research questions and participant responses to the interview questions.

Perceptions of Instructional Modalities

In this study, I investigated three research questions, the first of which sought to answer RQ1: What learning modalities and additional support measures give the second-year African American male community college student the most significant opportunity for degree attainment? While each participant's response slightly differed, the data consistently reflected that this group of African American males perceived lectures, unconventional office hours, group work, and critical thinking assignments as most significant for degree attainment. Four out of six students responded that the traditional lecture structure encouraged them to participate.

In response to the question of what they perceived as factors contributing to the success of African American male students, the participants spoke of instructor mentoring, clear instructions, and seeing people that looked like them. This compares to results presented by Wood and Turner (2011); they reported the critical role of faculty as a contributing factor to the academic success of African American men. These students' perceptions of instructional modalities are detailed in the interview transcriptions that follow. Barack stated that

Um, mainly individual assignments or thinking assignments. Um, and the reason I gotta say t-those were encouraging is because me, um, you know, assignments like those, again is unfair as it is, for me, are opportunities for me to showcase to, um, white people that black people aren't who you think they are. We're just as normal as you are, we're just as smart as you are. So those- I-I-I love assignments like those because, like I said, for me,

I'm proving people wrong. Not even, not even, I'm not even focused on me when I do these assignments. I'm thinking about black people and how we're viewed as a whole. Langston responded, "It was a group work connection." Sidney replied, "Um, I think during the lecture, when the professor just asks questions, it keeps me more engaged to, uh, just, you know, find the right answer. Sort of, sort to kind of have a conversation with you instead of just straight lecture."

Chadwick offered the following:

Uh, I would say, uh, lectures and, um, there's modules, different modules for each semester and breaking down assignments and the curriculum for the classroom, uh, the way they break it down per, per semester that helps out a lot. Instead of just, you know, releasing you with a bunch of information, it's, it's this is for this week, this is for that week. It's a lot of reading material but I think the modules and, uh, lectures, and the lectures are recorded, or if they do a live-on, they do record it so if you, if you, if there is something you don't understand and you can also, you can always refer back to it.

Nelson stated that

I will say a mixture of group work and teaching others to give with, a, you know, collection of peers and see how they attack, you know, their coursework and see how am I attacking it, which method is more effective, or if they're both equally effective, that it helped me also just teaching others I can kind of see how I'm gauging the information that's being taught when I'm coming across to others.

Leon responded that

Um, I would say, is lectures. Like I, I prefer, you know, in-person lectures. So, in-person lectures, um, I think, and definitely, I don't know if this has related, but office hours, I, I

really prefer, you know, seeing or meeting with professionals face-to-face, about quite a bit questions I have on whatever it is that he or she taught and, um, whatever assignments are due.

Next, I asked which teaching technique(s) was most effective as it relates to the academic success of African American males. This question was designed to get a deeper understanding of these students' perceptions of available instructional modalities and to gauge what they found most important in the classroom environment.

Barack responded:

Man, even that's gonna be somewhat difficult, um, because I, I just think that's the individual. Even to answer that, I'm about to say I know it's, it's not going to be the African American male typical answer, because I love online learning because it minimizes interaction. I get to control, you know, what I want to do, when I want to do it for the most part, and I don't have to help others. Uh, I don't have to participate in groups. Um, you know, before the pandemic, um, there were a few classes I had to go to class on campus, um, but I really love the online courses because I can, for me, it gave me more motivation because I can actually hide who I am. Like I don't have to put my profile picture on the Internet, so they don't know that they're even dealing with a, um, an African American. So, for me, online instruction, but again, I'm a nerd by trade. I, I love computers, I love reading and a lot of people don't. Some people actually need to be sitting in a classroom, in a desk, getting physically taught. Um, I think most, I would say most, uh, black men need to be in class. That's what I would say. They need in-person instruction.

Langston offered, “Ah . . . lecture. Is it communication? I can’t bear to be okay, like I understand the teacher taught process and personality.”

Sidney replied that

I believe working in groups. Um, I think that’s really important because . . . and not in assigned groups as well, because you need to be with different races and learn about them and that’s how the workforce will be. So, I think of a good learning technique is just working in groups, um, with all types of races involved.

Chadwick responded,

I think everybody’s different, but I think things that are, are, are visual, hands-on, uh, can, can give you, um, a deeper understanding of things. And sometimes I think if, if, a topic of discussion is, is relate . . . if an individual can relate to it, then they gain, they, um, they have more interest in it, you know? Because then you, let’s say in English discussion we’re talking about, um, slavery or something that just pertains to African American history or something in the past and you are engaged, and you want to learn about it. You’re gonna, you’re gonna try to do better and learn and absorb more information because you, it’s, it’s interesting to you, you know. Like I think I was doing a discussion last night, uh, about spanking and I related because that, we got disciplined as a child and it was an, it was an opinion. Uh, I think it had asked the question, uh, if children who got spanked at a younger age, did they develop a sense of, uh, it being okay to be abused by someone they live with. In my opinion, I didn’t, I didn’t think that. It was, to me, it was discipline and it kept you in line. You know, it’s just, time, I related to that because that’s how I was raised, you know.

Nelson responded that

I would say drawing this in but something that grabs our attention on whether it be like no not just cutting draw, you know what I said just you know, trying to be kind of being personal, keeping our attention whether it's adding humor adding you know, real life scenarios, that's something that draws me into instruction.

Leon offered, "I would probably say, in-person lectures."

Next, the participants shared their experiences regarding what other classroom factors contribute to their academic success. The students most often mentioned the need to be involved in engaging discussions, instructor mentoring, and activities geared toward developing the whole student.

Barack responded that

Um, well, competition, of course. Um, would have to say, um, the instructor, uh, addressing me. Small things like that, and, um, clear instruction. Um, their grading policies, uh, and I say that contributes to my success because if you know what you're walking into, and how to get from point A to point B, then it's to me, it's easier to be able to do that. Um, knowing when assignments are due. Um, this, when everything is laid out in front of you, and you have to go about that guy. Uh, there's nothing intangible, I think that contributes to my success. Um, I don't think engaging with people or going to see a mentor weekly would, would help, um, like I said, that's, that's up to an individual. Even- and you know what? I'm gonna- that was something I said earlier, and I don't know if they do this for the black people at the school, or if it's for everyone, I forgot to mention that. Every semester, all semester long, I consistently get emails from the university, um, asking if I would like to meet my mentor or advisor, and I always refuse because I don't, I personally don't need that. But again, I don't know if that's targeted

towards me because I'm black, or if that's just what they do for the students. I completely forgot about that.

Langston replied that

Umm, obviously, you know, just I was a group work, maybe a student who, like maybe a historian, and maybe help me out with some things. Maybe I help a student. It was some things like, as pertaining to the, you know, assignment or test or a quiz and I let them know like, 'Hey, the quizzes a bit like . . .' The kind of reminding people, like what's the next assignment, what's the next test, or what's the next quiz, and when is the final or what's going to be on the final, stuff like that.

Sidney responded, "I think the same people that look like me." Chadwick offered, "Um, no. I think we, that's, that's pretty much it. Like I said, because of COVID everything's a little different." Nelson stated,

For me what I've noticed is that only on I tend to go with whatever the class as a whole is feeling with the class as a whole was going on attentive. This is drawn on too long that I lose focus myself first of all, so I will say there's a little bit of peer pressure to it as well.

Leon stated that

Um . . . I would say, professors, um, I don't know, I think, willing professors, they're, you know, they're actually there, because I had, I wouldn't, I had really good professors, um, that were, you know, um, one-one of my professors, um, Dr. Dy[?], was one of the best friends I've had so far. So, instances like that were definitely, you know, factors that kept me, actually kept me, you know, wanting to come in class when I took on Developmental Psych. Um. Does that answer your question?

Then, continuing to assess their perceptions of instructional modalities, the next question focused on the participants' use of success coaches, tutoring, or mentoring at the college. This question was included to garner an understanding of these students' lived experiences with these types of student supports and to assess their comfort level with seeking dedicated assistance. While there was a general awareness of available assistance, except for a couple of instances, the participants reported that they did not use student support.

Langston commented, "Mmm' I have them mentor me by, anytime if I didn't understand the curriculum, I try to go down to like the tutor room, you know to get, yeah to get by someone else." Sidney stated, "I have not. No." Nelson shared, "Um, I didn't feel the need to. So I have now, . . . is this in regards to academics or like finances?" Leon responded, "Um, success coaches, mmm, no. I've used tutors if like, uhh, chemistry tutor. Like I was, like, other classes were pretty, pretty fun."

Shifting the conversation slightly, I questioned if the participants felt intellectually challenged at community college and what class or classes they found most fulfilling. The intent of this query was to examine specific types of classes that fostered persistence and if so, what was the predominant mode of instruction. The data show that the most intellectually challenging courses were those related to the student's degree.

Barack responded, "Uh, man, um, some courses, maybe one or two courses, uh, like I just took business statistics, and that was one of the most difficult courses I've taken in my life. I got an A, but for the most part, um, all is easy." Langston stated, "Mmm, no, I don't." Sidney responded, "Yes."

Chadwick offered,

Yes, um, classes that, that are directed at, at my major. Like, uh, I'm going for occupational safety and health. So, like, um, um, uh, industrial hygiene, classes like that, OSHA regulations, stuff like that are, that are, I, I see on a day-to-day basis, but now, I'm understanding more because we were doing the safety side of things in the industrial field, um, hazard-hazardous, hazardous waste, uh, response and management. Different things like that. Fire protection. It opens up a different realm of, of things when you, when it's, uh, it's something that you do on a normal basis. I guess for a major like whatever major individuals going for, I think that's what I find more interesting.

Nelson stated, "No." Leon responded, "Yes, when I was, um, when I first transferred over to Excellence College. I definitely was feeling a little challenged. Um, especially, you know, like, you know, some of the science courses I was taking, like, chemistry, AP biology."

The last interview question related to instructional modality pertained to social media. The purpose of this question was to examine if the colleges had a dedicated social media presence to connect with African American male students, and if social media might have utility as an alternate method to deliver instruction. I asked if their college used Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media platforms to deliver information to, solicit feedback from, or prompt interactions with African American male students. Sidney and Chadwick voiced a perception that the college afforded to interact with them via social media. Barack responded, Well, I can, the only social media that I follow is, uh, Facebook and I only did that when, uh, I was sent to Afghanistan and Pakistan in the military to keep up with my wife. Uh, and I can say that, uh, I've been at this community college for a year and a half now, I'll be graduating this December. I can say that they have never reached out to me on

Facebook. Uh, I wouldn't know about Twitter or Instagram because I, uh, I don't interact. I don't use social networking to interact with people.

Langston replied, "No." Sidney responded, "Yes, they do." Chadwick replied, "Yes." Nelson replied, "I definitely haven't noticed too much good individually towards African American students. Um, as far as the use of social media as the only thing I've noticed this email." Leon replied, "Um, I'm not really sure. I don't I don't know. Like as if they have, you know, Twitter, Snapchat? Not that I know of."

Perceptions of Status Attainment

This analysis includes conversations involving status as it relates to a student's perception of self, his perception of how others view him, and his perception of self within the context of economic and social status. This section presents what the respondents shared regarding RQ2: How does status attainment impact the academic persistence of second-year African American male community college students?

The participants were first asked a series of questions related to their perspectives of student success programs, such as freshman orientation, remedial learning, and life skills. My goal was to gain an understanding of the perceived value of these programs to assess if these programs had social and emotional impacts on their perceptions of status and acceptance on campus. Interestingly, only three of the six students engaged in student success programs. Barack and Leon stated that participation was only when required. Interestingly, Leon felt that if more African American males attended "the retention rates would be higher." Chadwick also made a striking point when he insinuated that student success programs tend to "mentally prepare students for the path ahead." Another perspective echoed in this section was the need for to be socially acceptance, but not at the expense of sacrificing their cultural individuality. Last, in

response to the question of how their past influenced their ability to succeed in community college, all respondents expressed a perception of strong past familial, personal, or academic connections that directly affected how they approached their current academic studies.

First, I asked if the students participated in student success courses, such as freshman orientations, student life skills, or remedial learning programs at your college. This question, similar to an earlier instructional modality question, was reintroduced to dig deeper into how the participants valued those programs with respect to African American male retention. The participants' responses ranged from not using the programs or only when mandatory to expressing that if more African American males participated, the retention rate would be higher. I noticed that by rephrasing the question to assess the students' perceptions of self, two-thirds of the participants engaged in student success programs. Barack responded,

Uh, none whatsoever. I want, I want, and as far as, uh, freshman orientation, uh, I will only participate in things like that if it's mandatory. As voluntary, [thump] I have no interest whatsoever in participating in anything community-related, anything, uh, group relate. Uh, I, you know I've, you know your study's gonna discover a lot of things, but I just wanna be left alone.

Langston offered, "I have been, oh well, I know at this semester I'm supposed to be in some sort of Spanish Club meeting. So, would that count? I don't know. I guess it would count." Sidney stated, "No, I think there is, um, because some, everybody doesn't learn at the same pace. So, I think having those courses they were encouraged more, um, people that don't feel adequate enough to be in the regular classes. It'll just encourage more education, uh, the higher education for all races."

Chadwick responded,

I did do the Student Success, uh, which I think is required through Success College when you first start. And, and I think it did help prepare me, uh, me mentally, for well, you know, starting college, you know. I do, I do, I do think that it, it prepares you, I mean, if you're, if you're engaged in it, right? Because you can go through the class. It's really not gonna count for any credit, but it's just in mentally, it's gonna prepare you, uh, to have a college mindset instead of you're coming out of high school, okay, this is what to expect during college and they, they, they take you in different directions and try to get you mentally prepared for college and I do think that helps, uh, African American males, uh, if you've never attended college to kind of take a different, uh, direction. Um, and start to think in a different, um, mindset as far as a student.

Nelson replied, "Yes, I do. But the other two that you mentioned, I did not participate in." In explaining the value that student success programs might have on African American male retention in college, Nelson stated, "To let them know that this is something that I may like this is something that I may be able to succeed in and I know that I have the resources available to do so. I believe those are the benefits of the programs you need, too." Leon responded, "Um, yeah, we're required, we were required to, um, attend orientation. Other programs, uh such as community colleges, aren't really, aren't really, um, like most people don't really attend them, or they're not really, you know, acknowledge to, um, to other students. Um, I definitely feel like if more African American males, you know, would attend things like those, or if it was, then your retention would, the retention rate would be higher."

Next, I examined the student's perception of status with respect to their social or academic peers; and, if they felt pressured to balance academic achievement and peer acceptance. The younger students shared that they identified with their classmates of the same

age. Conversely, those age 25 and older identified more with family and coworkers. In response to the follow-on question relating to being pressured to balance academics and peer acceptance, the students advanced some interesting perspectives. For example, Langston spoke of pressure being an African American male and Leon announced pressure for intellectual acceptance and for acceptance as a young adult. Barack responded,

Uh, I would have to say, uh, older students and professors. Not the, uh, younger generation because, uh, now work ethic and our views are so far apart that there's, there's no way I could relate to them or tolerate having to even, uh, beat with them because, um, I'm not one for, it's difficult because I'm not one for excuses and want to accept excuses. An', uh, people, as you know, have a lot of them. So, it's, usually the people I believe as my peers are successful like myself, because we have the same mindset. You know, like, if you need to study for an exam, you know you're gonna lose sleep. Well, everybody's not willing to sacrifice sleep. They say they don't have time to study, and I just, I can only deal with people like myself.

Langston replied,

I was a part of my family. My family. I will try to, like, look at, you know, ask them for advice and stuff like this. Basically, asking them for advice on how to maneuver through school and stuff like that . . . [I feel pressure] absolutely. . . Umm, just by, you know, obviously being an African-American and also, I'm the youngest in my family, so it's a lot of pressure. Like, it's a push all-time high for both ends with obviously, you know the history of, you know, of African Americans have been. The great history for us, you know, in this country and stuff. So, I'm trying to like at least make some sort of change.

Sidney offered, “People that I grew up with, um, from like high school. Um, I relate to them a lot and then also work as well. So, I consider them my friends. [but] no [don’t feel pressure to balance]. Chadwick replied, “Uh, I, uh, I would say, I’d say, my, my, my father and my, my wife will be, um, academically because my wife, uh, has her, has a bachelor’s degree and she, she pushes me pretty, pretty good to continue.” “No [I don’t feel pressured.]” Nelson responded,

I would say people that I meet that are within my age group, those are who I would consider my peers so people who share the same interests as me etc. that I get along with . . . [feel pressure to balance]. Oh, no, not really, I feel that if you truly want to do something to kind of make time to be able to make that balance yourself.

Leon offered,

My peers? Um, the people that I, you know, hang around, the people that I uh, do[?] homework with, um, close friends. You know, things like that, yeah. Study groups, you could even count as peers, people in the study group . . . [feeling pressure]. Oh, uh, yeah, for sure. Um, you know, you, of course, as a college student, and um, you want to, you know, be academically, well off in, you know, obviously by, just by being a younger adult, you know, you’ll be a lot of times, you’ll be influenced, uh, as to, that to be, you know, socially accepted.

Based on a hypothesis that one’s past influences impact current decisions, the next status question asked the students the following: What are the ways your past influences your ability to succeed in community college.? The intent of the questions was to gather the students’ perceptions of self within the scope of economic and social status. The students’ responses highlighted that their past experiences point to a need for socioemotional and cultural

assimilation consideration when considering African American males ability to succeed in community college.

Barack stated,

Um, well, my past affects me in a sense that I am very hesitant to, uh, be open in school. And by that, I mean, uh, I'm very hesitant to be approachable. I'm very hesitant to go in groups or participate in academic groups. Uh, but again, if I'm assigned to a group, um, I'll do everything I'm supposed to do. Uh, so let me be clear with that, but it's, my past makes, it's very difficult for me to interact with others. And I say that because, you know, unfortunately, that I, and I'm sure you got that earlier, that I was born and raised in Mississippi. So, I have, you know, Mississippi, Alabama, they're some of the most racist states in the country. So, I have a completely different view of interaction with people. Uh, so, it does actually not only control or affect what I do in school, it actually affects my life. And yes, the military has helped, but at the end of the day, you know, I'm still Black. So, there's no covering that up.

Langston stated, "Oh, adversity. Like I used to, I obviously, like learn from high school and stuff like that. Like adversity by overcoming a lot of stuff both academically and personally." Sidney responded,

Um, well, when I took a dual credit class in high school, I actually made, um, a C and I think that really impacted my future. And, and that I felt like I couldn't do it after that. After I graduated, I just felt like it was hard for me. Um, so I think the past experience when it was just, uh, a bad one, the future was just, um, I was just very scared of it.

Chadwick stated,

Um, I think my past, uh, the things that I, the way I carry myself in the past and the things that I did in the past, um, pushes me to succeed I think because, uh, you know, where I was, the high school that I went to, it was in the majority, um, either White or Hispanic. So, uh, my dad always pushed us to don't fit the stereotype, number 1, and number 2, you now, you get you an education. So always, always, uh, revert back to that whenever it gets to see or it seems to be getting a little too, too hard for me I guess, you know? Besides that, uh, he was in the Air Force or in the Army and he, um, we have the Hazelwood. Me and all my, all my siblings, which is a hundred, and I think 120 hours of college. That's, that's, that's, fate and so I feel like it's, I owe him that, you know, at least if anything else I'm gonna get my bachelor's degree.

Nelson responded, "Let's say I have always been somewhat distracted in different things that may not may or may not need to be focused on so that hinders my ability to do something."

Leon offered,

My past, as in like my childhood, or my past, as in like, uh . . . Uh, in my past, um, I was raised by a single mother. Um, so you know, my mom has a really big influence on me, um academically or [inaudible]. I wasn't the greatest, I wasn't, I never had the best grades in high school. But um, just going through, and um starting community college at home, I figured out what I wanted to do, you know. So, I'm [inaudible] I had an answer to this question . . . Yeah. My first semester actually was, um, was real big. Right now, I actually went on academic probation after my first semester. So, that really kind of sent me, kind of sent me off. Um, I realized that, you know, I had to, you know, really change things around, and um. So, you know, after that, after the fall semester in 2018, my academic career slowly started to progress.

In response to the question “Do you feel socially connected on campus”?, all the respondents answered that they are not socially connected due to the transient nature of community college. However, the extent possible within the context of being a virtual learner, Chadwick replied that he is socially connected. Barack’s responded,

Uh, in no way, whatsoever, no . . . Okay. Well, again, I take, you know, some students don’t some students do, uh, I take what’s going on every day in the world, in the country and I extrapolate that to my life because for me, what I see on the news, what I read in the paper, what I read on the Internet is a reflection of American society. Um, and so I know as a whole, American society does not like Black people. Uh, I know as a whole, Black men are viewed as threats and that’s how I live my life. Does it make me angry? Yes. Do I walk around angry? Uhm, maybe. Do I walk around on a front[?] looking like, you can’t talk to me? Yes. That’s intentional. Leave, leave me alone because I don’t want to start anything, and I am completely aware that once a black man is involved, the rules change, the situation’s changed simply because I’m Black . . . So, I don’t want to interact with people. I want to keep interaction to a minimum because even when I get invited, I turn them down because I know what’s going to happen. I’ll go to these parties or go to these events, and someone will probably say something that they’re comfortable saying and maybe they realize what they’re saying, maybe they don’t, but I realize what they’re saying. And again, am I gonna physically attack someone? No, but I’d rather just know you from afar than know you up close because I feel like once I know you up close, I might not wanna know you at all, if you understand what I’m saying.

Langston replied, “Hmm, every . . . I usually like my main focus is kind of like, you know achieve the highest education you could possibly get. I talk to people every now and then

but I'm now focused on basics like school." Sidney responded, "No, I don't. Uh, I feel like in community college, just everybody does their own thing. It's not really a lot of people staying on campus and, uh, you know, not many clubs. I think it's just different from university in that way."

Chadwick replied,

Yeah. Just, just, just to some extent. But I mean like we like we discussed earlier it's, you know, most of the time it's just, uh, for our final, we come in and we have to take the final in person or I've had, I've had a couple of classes last, last semester. I did have a couple of classes in person, but we're spread out and most of the time it was just material class, material would run over. But as far as the individuals that were there, yeah, we, we, we connected as much as we could, you know.

Nelson offered, "No at all um, within a community college." Leon responded,

Um, no, not really. Um, Excellence County, from where I live, was about a 30-minute drive, so, um, for me, it was really just all about . . . On a normal day, I would just go to school in the morning, go to work in the afternoon. It really wasn't much social interaction with anybody except for, like, maybe a couple of my buddies from high school, you know, going to the same college.

As a reminder, RQ2 examines how status attainment impacts the academic persistence of second-year African American male community college students; and the interview questions surrounding status were developed to capture the student's perceptions of self, perceptions of how others view them, and perceptions of self within the scope of economic and social status.

Accordingly, this section concludes with my asking the participants to explain how financial status and family environment influenced their academic pursuits.

Barack responded,

Well, my financial status definitely, uh, helps because I don't have to struggle to, um, register. I don't have to struggle to purchase books or school supplies and, and I know that can be difficult. Um, um, and my family status, a-again, when I recently went to, went to Auburn University, '92 to '94, uh, when I graduated high school at '92, and I didn't have any family support, didn't have any money, and that's part of the reason why it didn't work out. And it was a struggle, getting my books 're sometimes two to three weeks after classes started, and you can't fall away behind. Uh, so financial status helps tremendously. You definitely need family support. Luckily for me, my kids are, I have a 12-year-old son and a five-year-old daughter, they're really young, so they don't really interfere with, interfere with my school life. And my wife is completely supportive and that's a big, big factor because, you know, if you have to go to a study group or go on campus to do research, what you can't have is a jealous spouse saying, "Where are you going?" or "Why are you going for two hours?" Or someone who's constantly calling you or texting you while you're trying to study. If you don't have that support, that's just another rock on the pile of can't do.

Langston offered,

Okay, obviously, yeah it influenced a lot. Even though, like we're all together as a family is, like, we're not relying on a buddy that much. We're tightening it, close family. We all believe in one another. We believe that we can all succeed at, as a family together, and we can overcome anything.

Sidney responded,

Um, well, I think education for me came easier, because, um, I had a mom that went to college. So, I think that inspired me to do the same thing. And for other people that come from a lower socioeconomic status, I think it's just more difficult for them because the education has not encouraged or, you know, it's hard to be the pioneer of going to school, um, because you know, it's just a difficult process.

Chadwick replied,

I just think, I, having three boys and one girl and, and, um, for me, the main thing is because they're biracial. Uh, and I think that to set a standard and show them that no matter where, how late, or just the main thing is that, that education is, is, after God, education is the most important. God, family, and education.

Nelson responded, "Okay, at the at the start of my degree, it probably did influence it very negatively. I didn't have much so just going in [financial aid office] trying to find out what resources I can use and it made it a little bit more harder." Leon offered,

Um, well, it, my finance, it was, um, I didn't have to, like pay for my tuition or anything like that. Um, I'm fortunate enough to where my parents are able to pay my tuition.

While I was at, um, Excellence County, oh, it made it like a lot easier, you know, like a lot of other people, I knew they had to, you know, pay their tuition, and stuff like that.

Perceptions of Degree Attainment

In line with discovering predictors of degree attainment and reviewing obstacles facing higher education, and by extending AAMCCSs, I next examined what second-year, African American male, community college students perceived as institutional barriers to degree attainment. Following the interview protocol, I asked a set of probing questions that required the participants to articulate their view of institutional commitment toward addressing African

American male retention, the specific challenges they perceived as African American community college students, and their desired student support systems.

The data revealed that 83% of the students stated that there was not a clear institutional commitment to address African American male student retention. Then, when asked to provide specific challenges they face, some interesting perceptions were communicated. Barack said that his challenge was “just being Black” and Nelson said that he was faced with daily negative perceptions of African American males’ intelligence and their ability to attain a degree. All the respondents conveyed a desire for an increased presence of African American male mentors, counselors, advisors, and administrators on campus. And when I asked what question that they would like to pose to school leaders regarding African American male degree attainment, this group of students presented a broad variety of questions that addressed issues of diversity, student services, and cultural sensitivity. For example, Barack questioned, “Why are we not reaching out to middle- and high-school African American males?” Chadwick queried if the college would consider providing aid that bridges the gap between degree attainment and job placement. Presented below are details on how these participants responded to questions regarding their perceptions of degree attainment.

When the discussion of RQ3 was finished (What do second-year, African American male community college students perceive as institutional barriers to degree attainment?), I found that there was no perception that these colleges demonstrated a commitment to retain African American males. In fact, multiple participants shared that there was not a clear institutional commitment to address the retention of African American males at their community college. Barack offered,

Um, no, uh, but there is, I say no, because although there is a commitment to retaining students, like, I do get emails from the retention manager, it's, uh, it's for all students.

It's not specifically for, you know, being African-American.

Langston responded, "A clear one? Not really. I don't know now." Sidney replied, "No."

Chadwick offered,

I believe it is, that there's a, what, it's, they just, I think they handle retention very well. I mean, even if you start and you don't, you're, uh, you begin and you haven't gone in a while or you just missed some semesters, they try to stay in communication with you to try to get you to go back or finish or at least take some classes, something online just to continue. Success College is pretty good at that.

Nelson responded, "There's not, no." Leon replied, "Um, no, no. Not at all."

The participants were then asked, if given the chance to talk with your school leaders, what are questions you would ask regarding male, African American degree attainment. This question garnered a wide swath of thoughtful responses, each addressing an aspect of African American male student development. The replies in this section also demonstrated, if given the chance, these students would engage with their campus leaders. The participants wanted to question the college leaders about the lack of back programs that sought to serve middle- and high-school African American males; they wanted to propose measures to increase diversity in the curricula and the staff. Barack stated that

Um, I would ask, "Why are you not reaching out to middle-school and high-school African American males? Why, why are you not making, um, African Americans aware of their other educational opportunities?" And by that, I mean, I'm disappointed. You know, I work at a chemical plant. I'm actually an engineer for Lyondell Basell. I'm, I'm

getting this degree so I can hopefully move up into management. I mean, you understand you have to give your, you have to give people reasons, not say no, uh, which is what I'm doing. But um, you know, at this particular university, because of the era I live in, like, we're known as Corpus Christi is in South Texas, which is pretty much the refinery capital of the world, because we have so many different plants and refineries out here. I would ask them, "Why aren't you doing more to inform these men about this type of program?" You don't need to get an engineering degree or chemistry degree or business degree. You can get, uh, chemical operator degree and then move in for an instrument technician degree, which is a one-and-a-half year program, and within three years, you can make six figures. And the total cost of the program is between \$10,000 and \$15,000. You know, why aren't you making us, when I say us, I mean Black men, aware of things like that. Um, because they don't know about and, and, you know, I'm not from here, originally. I'm from Mississippi, I met my wife here, which is why I'm here. So I don't, I don't know how to go to these schools and reach out to them. You know, Success College should be doing it. And Success College should reach out to their, to their students that are already there and ask them, "Are you aware of these programs?" Maybe they do that through mentoring, uh, uh, or advisors. I don't, I don't know but I would ask them that, and I would ask them, "What type of outreach programs do you have geared towards Black men?" Because, you know, we're under attack in this country. We read the news, you see the news every day, um, or you should be doing more. I feel like they should be doing more to, uh, I wanna say keep an eye on but that's not the right word, but to help ensure a path of success all the way through, because I guarantee you, my Black experience is not unique. Uh, you know, Black men need help, you know, we need to feel

like we're wanted. We need to feel like we're part of a team. And, you know, we need to feel like we can walk up and talk to people and associate with people without being chastised or stereotyped or, you know, accused of being a drug dealer because we're driving a new [inaudible] or things like, like, all of those things affect us. Everything that happens on TV affects us.

Langston responded,

Umm, basically, like, why aren't there any like, you know, African Americans study courses of the diversity, professors, or faculty members. Umm, like more, why we got to go to my other . . . you know, why we are going to, like, other universities to find our degrees, and stuff like that. Like basically trying to, because originally, I wanted to transfer somewhere, and try to get a degree but the degree wasn't . . . my degree would be at a certain university. Like, for example, I would try to find like ,a, I always wanna be like, sports time is, so I try to go for maybe a degree in communications. And trying to find a new, at Excellence College, but they don't have my degree. So, they were like, oh, I have to go like Houston-Victoria or somewhere like that, to find my degree.

Sidney replied, "Um, I would ask for more scholarships dedicated to African American males um, just because I think the statistics there's not as many as other races. Am I right?"

Chadwick responded,

I would ask, um, and it, I would say, um, after obtaining a degree, or when you're getting closer to the end, what, if there was some, a bridge, to help a little more as far as job placement or career placement, or to direct you into, uh, a right direction because sometimes you face up, you face up, um, um, uphill battle that they may, with or without a degree, uh, they may not understand, but even with the degree, I feel like sometimes

opportunities you're not, are not as, as accessible as they, they may think because you have a degree, if that makes sense. Because that's what I'm, that's what I'm dealing with right now. I'm putting some résumés here and there because I'm almost to the end. December, I'll graduate. Uh, and I've heard a couple of responses, but I think with the assistance of a college, I think if they put their name along with your name and, or just but maybe the closer I get to the end maybe there's more assistance or more direction. And I'll see, uh, the closer we get to December, um, and then we'll take it from there. But I don't want to say that they're not doing it because maybe I'm not at that point yet. I'm doing everything on my own at this point, but, uh, we're September, October, we're three, four months away. Maybe they should start a little sooner if, if that's available or, um, just kind of direct you, maybe you know, if you're gone this far to obtain an associate's degree, um, you know, maybe they have a placement. I haven't, uh, a formal interview, and maybe that's when they start, um, directing. I'm not sure.

Nelson offered,

I would see if they've looked into it, how have you noticed, you know, a percentage of a degree attainment from your community college amongst American African versus you know, the other populations? Are you doing something to you know, try to fit that to provide them with the resources that they may need? That's the question.

Leon responded,

Um, I would ask, um, what are some either student either services or resources, you know, they could be implemented to help, you know, African American students. African American male students obtaining their AA degree or AS degree, or whatever, you know, EMT or vocational certificate that they're trying to obtain.

While still focusing on institutional barriers to degree attainment, the participants were asked if there were any specific challenges they experienced as an African American male student. This question, like the previous, stimulated fruitful conversation. Sadly, the bulk of the responses featured perceived implicit biases in the classroom and in the development of institutional initiatives that nurture increased African American male success rates. Barack responded,

Yeah. And the specific challenges, uh, basically, yeah, just, uh, being Black. Uh, you know as, as much as I hate to say it, for the most part, um, people, people do not like Black people. And I walk around, that is, that is always with me everywhere I go. Every time I open my mouth, every time I shake somebody's hand, I have to wonder, how were they with Black people? Um, and I don't mean the people that say I have a Black friend because you may have a Black friend, but you probably won't let that friend date your daughter. That means you don't like Black. Um, Black people as a, as a whole, they see and they know what's going on around them. Um, they know that the reason that, uh, you know your waiter or waitress, uh, is each taking a long time to come to your table, they know why that happens. Yes, people get bad service but I guarantee you, Black people get it more. Um, they know that, uh, people aren't sitting around you in the classroom because they don't wanna be around the Black person. And [exhales] and they also know that they have to be conscious of their interaction with others because, you know, you're getting upset with a student. It's completely different from a regular student getting upset with a student. Your interaction with that student, your argument is gonna be blown up and they're not gonna feel safe and, and that's the keyword. Even the policemen know

how to do it. I was in fear for my life. So, you know, that interaction, that is always in our head everywhere we go.

Langston replied,

Well, obviously, no, being African American, obviously the success rate is probably low. I was assuming the low so I tried to, like, make that number go up and hopefully, I wanna be the only person that makes that number go up. Hopefully our start a trend of other people that come after me. Also succeed, as well.

Sidney offered,

Um, I just think in history class. It just makes me uncomfortable learning about, uh, learning about the slaves. 'Cause I felt that the African Americans, they're not in control of the narrative that they wrote in the history books.

Chadwick responded,

Um, no, not, not really. Um, and I, and I think and I, I guess, I thank God to it, but I think that without the Hazelwood, the challenges could be presented because I think financially, sometimes it could be a strain on somebody who doesn't normally have the, uh, opportunity that I have. I could see that as being a challenge.

Nelson stated,

Um, there definitely are, there's a negative perception of African American males by some individuals, and that's something that we have to have to overcome on a daily basis. Something that unfortunately, we get used to living with, I believe that it just gives me personally the drive to work that much harder.

Leon offered, "Um, like— said, some, there were a lot of professors that seemed fair, there were - not a lot, a couple of professors that seemed like they weren't, you know, willing to help, you

know, some, some other races, like African, like myself and a couple of my buddies are in the same class at HCC.”

Earlier, during the Instructional modality discussion, the students were asked to elaborate on which teaching techniques and classroom factors contribute to academic success.

Subsequently, the next question in this section asked what activities, services, and/or programs support the advancement of African American male students at community college. I included this question to allow the participants to unfold their previous response within the context of degree attainment.

Barack responded,

Well, I can say that, um, they do a good job of that. Um, all semester long, every semester, I'm consistently getting emails about actually all of those programs, but again, those aren't, those are for everyone not tailored towards me because I'm Black. Those are just, you know, I get emails on financial aid or, or, uh, tutoring services, the writing center. Uh, none of which I use, but they, I am aware of all of those, and they do a good job of informing you about which services are available to you. I can say that.

Langston stated, “How do . . . I don't know about that one. Probably have to research it.” Sidney replied, “I didn't recognize any actually.” Chadwick replied, “I don't think, honestly, I don't think there is, because I, uh, as far as, I've no- I've seen some fliers for Hispanic Heritage Month, just different things of that nature, but as far as I know of, you'd be the first one to reach out as far as, uh, directly directed to African Americans.” Nelson offered, “In different scholarships geared towards African-Americans. So, know that, you know, they do notice that we need resources. So that's one of them I can think of it.” Leon stated, “I'm not aware of any right now.”

The concluding question regarding institutional barriers to degree attainment required the student to expound on their perception of higher education supports. The participants were asked the following: “In terms of increasing graduation rates, what would an African American male student support system look like for you?” All the student expressed a need for organizational supports, such as mentoring, focus groups, advising, and student organizations, that were African American-male-centric. Barack offered,

Oh, that’s easy. It would, not a doubt, it would have to be predominantly Black. Um, and I say that because it is about race. If we’re talking about support, they need to be comfortable, first of all, and that’s just the simple fact of the matter. If I go to the African American student support center, and I walk in and the secretary is, uh, Caucasian female and a Caucasian male, or Caucasian female, or Asian or Mexican, uh, walks out and introduce himself to me, I’m already turned off. Uh, because I’m gonna say, “Where’s the Black people?” Um, I mean, yes, it’s noble that you have this division, but how serious are you about it? Um, if you want Black people to succeed, get more Black people to help the Black people that you want to succeed. Because I, although I have no proof of this, I can only say what I believe. I believe, as a whole, you know, we as African Americans are distrustful of other people because of what’s happened in the past and what’s currently going on. It’s not easy to trust others or their motivations. Like I’m even, I’m upset that I found out that, uh, you know, the, uh, financial aid offices, they’re able to use our information in federal documentation to meet goals and numbers. I don’t even like that. Even on all documents, I try not to include race, because I don’t want people to know who I am. Uh, I wanna be treated like an individual, and a White person or an Asian person is not gonna be able to understand what I’m going through when I’m

walking into that office, telling you about my day. You know, that they, the worst thing, uh, people can do when a, when a Black person is coming to you for help or support is you try to make that person, that Black person question what has happened or is that, do you really think it's about race? That's the worst. You can't get other people trying to tell Black people what he is or isn't racist or what he is or isn't uncomfortable. If it's uncomfortable to me or racist to me, then that's what it is and nobody's gonna change my mind. If you start saying things like that, I'm not gonna argue with you. I'm just gonna say, "You know what? You're probably right." I did probably overreact [inaudible]. They probably didn't mean it that way. And then that's gonna be the last time I come to you. I'm gonna move on.

Langston stated,

I would say maybe like a committee. Like a committee team of, like, highly educated, maybe like higher educated members of where I came from, like HBCU schools, among other universities. Focus solely on maybe hanging out, do degree programs, do seminars. I would say hand out a program, may be a part, like, a graduation program, like tuition. Obviously, tuition that they basically trying to like help the Black community. Give more, like, graduates to walk across the stage. I may be encouraged.

Chadwick responded,

I, I would just say encouragement. Just have somebody, because it's sometimes and it's the same, you know, uh, fall, spring, um, summer. Along summer too, even Maymester, and it's just, you know, if you can have somebody during that time and say, "Hey man, you're almost there." This is what we're looking at. Um, are, what are your plans for this? Just to kind of, like an, almost like an advisor, but just kind of a little personal to

say, 'Hey, I noticed you got this.' 'Your GPA, it's slipping.' 'Hey . . .' You know? 'Is there anything we can do to help you'? Just kind of encouragement and encouragement/guidance to keep you on track, on path. Because, you can get, but I know I still have two more years to obtain my bachelor's. But I mean, it can get, uh if you're at it alone, it can, it can be a lot.

Nelson stated,

I'm creating, I wouldn't say, peer-led but peer advice in a way a group of us that we can talk about together what we need, what we want to see and then get that together as a resource to be used. That would help me.

Leon responded,

Probably, probably, you know, can either relate to what it is kind of like being an African American male student at a community college or tutors that can or African American, you know, tutors they know. They are willing to teach and to tutor. Not just teach but tutoring, you know, help African-American students, African-American male students that need it. But that's really about it.

Perceptions of Race

The participants were each asked race-specific questions to gather a deeper understanding of their perceptions of race concerning the challenges they faced in community college, the academic impacts, and if they observed racism on campus. Most of the responses, mirroring the perceptions reported earlier, alluded to a sense of being viewed in a negative light, disparity in access opportunities, and the desire for African American male counselors. Barack asserted that one of his challenges is being continually consumed with the thought that he is viewed as "the angry Black man." To highlight what these African American male students valued in their

college experience, each student was asked to discuss what their community college might do to increase the value of their collegiate experience. Again, increasing the number of African American male instructors and administrators were most mentioned. Chadwick, extremely knowledgeable of the limitations placed on community colleges, suggested that colleges be more forward thinking and implement supports that address traditionally challenging areas to African American males.

The last question in this section was the following: “Do you believe that the placement test accurately evaluates your college readiness in Reading, Mathematics, and Writing”? I included this query to ascertain if these students’ perceptions might be a challenge to dominant ideologies, to institutional assumptions of objectivity. Langston categorically rejected the placement test and said, “They should be eliminated.” Four out of the six participants perceived the placement test as helpful in evaluating college readings. Interestingly, Leon held that college placement tests should be required in high school. That way, students would have a chance to improve their scores before registering for their first classes and reduce the likelihood of having to take remedial courses.

These perceptions of the Race theme provides connections between the research questions and the CRT tenets discussed in Chapter 5. Each perception of race question is presented in this section, followed by the participants’ responses.

First, the participants were asked to describe the challenges they faced as an African American male community college student. The challenges included a sense of being stereotyped, perceived as unequal to other races, needing additional assistance in the course selection process, and postcollege planning.

Barack responded,

Uh, well, um, I guess being able to, to, uh, connect and relate with, uh, most of the students. And all of that has been, uh, exacerbated by the current, uh, status of everything that's been happening in the country, which was, which is I believe, uh, magnified and accelerated during the previous, uh, presidential administration. 'Coz now, overall, especially Black men, um, for the most part, from my experience, are viewed in a negative light. And you can even, even when trying to deal with people, whether, um, if there is an issue, you can actually sense and see the fear in them because they don't want to get angry. And in turn, you know, for me, that even makes me more upset that I feel like, um, they're afraid of, which only serves to continue the stereotype of the angry Black man.

Neither Langston nor Sidney responded directly to the question. Chadwick stated, "Um, I would say some of the challenges started from actually enrolling and just understanding what's available, uh, to you as a student. I think, it, mainly an African American, too."

Nelson responded,

One of the challenges that I've faced with that, or maybe I would say, the level of help that I have in attaining my degree, which is a degree in Business Administration, so I sign up for the college. I basically get to all where the class is going to take are at the very beginning for my freshman year, other than that, going further along within my career, or even take a summer course as well, trying to obtain my bachelor's degree, I don't have very much help in that. So, I'm just told what I have not taken in. That's basically it.

Leon responded,

Um, I'd say maybe in the, in the early start of my college career, um, probably access to my professors. Um, I would notice here, one of my first government professors would,

you know, kind of get with more students a little more than, you know, couple me, me and my other buddies are in the same class. So, um, I'm not going to give out names or anything like that. But um, my first year in 2018, in the fall of 2018, my government professor would, um, there were definitely some, you know, restrictions not, not placed, but there were definitely, you know, unequal opportunities in that class.

The participants were then asked how their perceived challenges impacted them. Their responses reflected strong feelings of perceived social injustice and unequal access. Barack, the oldest student and raised in Mississippi, stated that the challenges he faces both motivates and angers him. Nelson mentioned the extra expense associated with not getting proper guidance, which equated to taking unnecessary classes. Leon expressed that the challenges of disparity and unequal access makes him want to leave school. Barack replied,

Academically, uh, you know, I guess, because of, um' for me, it's a bit different, especially being a military, it, it, um, it motivates me. And, of course, it makes me angrier, but it motivates me to, uh, do, do better because I know, unfortunately, and even with yourself, as unfair it- and as unfair as it is, you know, you're a representation of your entire race. And so, when I go through these things, I think back on that, and I know, well, I need to make an A on this test because they already think I'm dumb. So, I have to do it to prove them wrong because if I fail, and you know, I think I speak rather well and people think I'm somewhat intelligent in our field. Guess what they're gonna think about other Black people who they perceive to be even lesser than I am. And it makes me hit my academics harder.

Langston replied,

Umm, yeah. I'm in for sure because I was like, I didn't know where, when it first came out, I didn't know what COVID-19 was, stuff like that. I am saying, like, what COVID was. And then all my classes had . . . I was affected by it because all my classes went from face-to-face to online. So, I can a matter of like, because from January to like March, I was like face-to-face, and all of a sudden, the rest of the semester, it went from face-to-face to online. So, I had to, like, but just, and I had a difficult time adjusting to that.

Sidney responded,

I do. I feel like other students get, um, a better opportunity because, um, like I have a set of expectations where it's, just, I always view in another race, since I'm a minority, as better. And I just have this preconceived notion, um, that sometimes I just can't reach up to my potential just because of, um, I grew up, too, in a predominated, uh, White school. So just being a minority, I feel it is more difficult.

Chadwick responded, "Um, because of race, like because of race, um, n-not really. Not at Success College." Nelson replied, "I'm taking courses outside of what I need to be taking. So, I'm spending more money and spending more time attaining a degree than what's necessary."

Leon offered,

Um, it was like, that way, it impacted me, um, I didn't, it made me feel like, you know, I just didn't know either. I didn't wanna, I had a feeling like I didn't want to be there anymore in that class anymore. Um, I actually ended up failing a class, my first, um, college semester. So, it, um, I'm gonna say, kind of like, feels neglectful.

I then asked participants the following question: "On your campus, have you observed racism towards African American male students"? Interestingly, three of the six students

responded in the affirmative. Chadwick replied, answering from the lived perspective of COVID-19, this could be different had the pandemic not occurred and there were more face-to-face encounters. Barack stated,

I would say, yes. Uh, even with, uh, with me directly. Um, you know, on our, for our, uh, portal, our school portal, it's called Canvas, and, um, it was during, um, I think, uh, two semesters ago, was a power, a Microsoft Word. And I was making a comment with regards to a discussion post that a student made and it was about the State of Mississippi. My comment was I really disliked the state of Mississippi, which is where I was born and raised. They should really wipe that state off the map, uh, because it's so backwards and racist. And the, uh, the professor sent me a private message and told me that, uh, my comments were out of line and that, um' that's not everyone's experience with, with Mississippi, and I-I had no right to, uh, to say that. And so, she removed my comment. Um, she docked me 10 points, and then, uh, she also docked me, um, another- an additional 10 point' because, um, I didn't write in paragraph form. And I said, I replied that I assure you, I know how to initiate document in paragraph form, uh, and this is a-a discussion. This isn't the grammatical portion of the, of the assignment. You know, you're like in the military, when you say, "Permission to speak freely."

Sidney stated,

I do. I feel like other students get, um, a better opportunity because, um, like I have a set of expectations where it's just I always view in another race, since I'm a minority, as better. And I just have this preconceived notion, um, that sometimes I just can't reach up to my potential just because of, um, I grew up too in a pre-dominated, uh, White school. So just being a minority, I feel it is more difficult.

Langston, and Chadwick responded that they had not seen racism against African American males on campus. Nelson did not directly reply to question. Leon said, “No. Wait, except for that, um, that previous situation. Um, not for a time.”

To capture a fuller insight of their perceptions of race, a probative question was inserted. I asked participants how that experience with racism affected or influenced them.

Barack responded,

You know, when things, when things like that happened to me, un-unfortunately, all-all it does for me is confirm, uh, the way that I feel and what I, what I think about, um, you know, American society, in general. Um, it really makes it difficult to, I guess, interact with, interact with others or even enjoy the college experience. And even for me, because I’m, I’m, I’m a, a returning student, you know, I’m in my 40s, um, I’m more aware of, of people, uh, of social interaction because I’ve been all over the world and met, met with so many different types of people. So, you really have to go with it alone. I don’t use tutoring services. I don’t reach out to professors if I’m experiencing difficulties on assignments. You know, I research it on my own because I just, I don’t want, I hate being reminded of my skin color, basically, is what I’m saying. I’ve- I tried to do everything I can to minimize those chances because like I said, people are getting more and more bold these days. And I know how confrontational I can be, and I just rather not deal with it at all.

Then, recalling that a key purpose of this study was to present problem-solving data that institutional leaders might use to increase African American persistence and degree attainment, I asked the participants to provide examples of what might their community college do to increase the value of their collegiate experience.

Barack stated,

Well, I know they can't really, you know, do this, uh, per se, because of the location of where- where I'm at in our [inaudible] Texas, but, uh, you know, increasing, um, African American representation on campus, um, I don't even know that there's maybe one or two African American presses out of, out of the whole- whole, um, the entire school. They, they don't have any type of African American, uh, outreach, uh, branches, clubs, or anything of that nature. Um, there's no sense of, um, culture or community for African American people at the school, so I think of the workforce that make people really feel, uh, welcome, that would, that would help tremendously. Cause even with this, and you know, I say that you can look at the stark differences between the Black Lives Matter movement and the Stop Asian Hate movement. And, you know, I've been, you know, I'm against all, all discrimination. But to see how people react to the Black Lives Matter that some are for, most are against, you know, because of Black Lives Matter, they came up with Blue Lives Matter. And, you know, I've even told, told professors in, uh, in, in cordial discussions that, you know, when people say Black Lives Matter and their retort is Blue Lives Matter, I asked, "To save the whale mean screw the dolphins?" No, it doesn't. It means to focus on the whales. Um, so it's always that rhetoric and that competitiveness with Black Lives Matter but, you know, with the Stop Asian Hate, the entire country got behind it. And in less than a year, Congress enacted a new hate-crime law specifically tailored to protect Asians. And, you know, a place like a university should be aware of that and reach out to their Black students. It's just like you said, to talk about how you feel because, to me, although that's a noble thing that Congress did, what 'bout me? You know, I'm left, I'm told to get over it, move along. It's all in your

head. Everything is about race, but yet when another race, basically, has the exact same complaint, the entire country gets behind it and talks 'bout how unfair they're being treated. So, it's, you know, some support services to deal with things like that would, would definitely help because the only person I have to lean on is my wife.

Sidney offered, "Um, I think maybe teaching more about Black history. I think that's really important. Um, and adding more, uh, professors that are African American. There's not really a lot of African American professors at Success College."

Chadwick stated the following:

Um, I mean, the, the semester's sixteen weeks, most semesters and I think, and it could be also because I was taking some, you know, because I started into 2015 and I took a break. And then, I, I continued back, uh, the beginning of '20 or '19, you know, '20, and, um, it could be because it's the summer sessions. That, that could give you the impression, because it's, it's shorter, you know. The sessions are shorter. So, um, to do anything different I think, they're, relaying the information the best that they can for the timeframe that they have. And you just, you have each person you're just gonna have to apply themselves the best that they can as well. You know, you gotta kind of adapt 'coz this is all new for everybody.

Nelson replied, "Um, whether it be, you know, financial setbacks, moral setbacks, so much thinking that we can't do it? Or even just academic setbacks, what classes are or what tutoring do we need? Etcetera, just those types of challenges?"

Leon stated that

[they would] probably give more resources out to, um, students. Um, I actually went to HCC [Houston Community College] my first year, and then for two years, I went to

another college in Excellence County. So, um, HCC could definitely use more resources, they could uh use more or student services, they could do improve the student services, um, improve, I would say, um, a lot of the professors could use a lot of improvement, or, you know, things around that or . . . the quality of the professors. In my personal, in my personal um experience at HCC, um, a lot of the professors that I had were, they weren't really, like, they weren't, they weren't really good professors, if I put in a simple term.

Based on the understanding that timely completion of developmental courses directly impacts degree attainment; and that the data revealed might support challenges to longheld ideologies, I elected to gather the participants' perceptions of the placement test. The participants were asked if they believed the placement test accurately evaluated their college readiness in reading, mathematics, and writing, and were there other assessment methods better suited to evaluate their academic abilities. The data showed that 33% of the participants favored eliminating the placement test because students of color do not have equal opportunity in the K-12 level, therefore are predestined to score lower and be placed on a remedial education track. Barack stated,

Uh, you know, for the most part, I would have to say, yes. I-I don't think the test is too complex. Although I've never taken it, my wife's daughter had to take it and I believe her scores were an accurate representation of where I thought she was, intellectually. Um, and, um, you know, although I believe it does help and it is an accurate depiction of where a person is, intellectually, um, again, it's still a difficult thing to, uh, difficult thing that, that you do accept or have to do all the which require because again, I said I can, I can tie everything into, you know, what, like, people like all day, you know, with standardized testing, and for me, that goes back to high school and your grade school.

You know, like, for me at my high school, when I went to college, for high school, they didn't even offer calculus. And, um, you know, blacks are consistently, in every facet of life, are given less, yet expected to do more. And that's part of the reason why the, uh, failure rate is so high because, you know, we don't have the requisite skills to be able to be on a basic level. But, yeah, I do think that that test is an accurate depiction of where a person is, intellectually, as unfair as it might be.

Langston said that

no I don't, I don't, because I felt like those tests are trying to, like put you in a box per se, right. It feels like, I've been like, they try to put you in the box and said, "Oh, here. If you test this year in this level, you're in this field." I felt like, I'm like, no that's kind of like putting certain people in a box. And I'm like, I feel like coz I know I scored kind of low, so point where, like, I had to start off at the development level, even though I'm like, I'm not development level. I am like, as educatable anybody else. So it's kind of like, I feel like it's just like a way to put you in a . . . put me like in some sort of a box.

Sidney stated, "Yes." Chadwick offered the following:

No, I don't. The, the placement test, the, the, uh, I just took, I mean, it, it does, it does, uh' it is effective but it's just that if you've been out of, uh, like I was out of high school, I graduated in '2000. So if, if you don't start attending college until, uh, 2015, that's 15 years out of school. Uh, so the time that you're displaced from school just because you're doing life things where you have to work, uh, it doesn't mean that you don't, it's just that you haven't used that information in so long that when you're, when you're tested on it, you're not going to do over well because you haven't retained a, a lot of that, that information.

Nelson replied, “I do believe that.” Leon responded, “I would say so. I would say. Um, I came from, it wasn’t, for me, it wasn’t that difficult. Well, I passed it in high school so I would- I wouldn’t have any, um, much input on it, what, yeah, it was. Yeah.”

Emergent Themes

The data were analyzed utilizing both NVivo and hand coding techniques. During the NVivo coding, degree attainment, instructional modalities, race, and status were inserted as the parent nodes. Then, to gather a better overall perspective, keywords from the interviews, such as *support system*, *mentor*, *challenge*, *race*, and *success*, were used as child nodes. The hand coding techniques included selecting passages from the interview transcripts that were in direct response to the question at hand. There were numerous transcript sections in which participants interjected additional commentary not directly related to the question. The pertinent responses were assigned to the respective question. The next activity included reading through the selected responses and highlighting words or phrases that reflected reference to the African American experience. Numerous responses were identified as applicable to all students, not specifically African American males; thus, only those particular to the African American experience were selected. The highlighted words and phrases were then compared to the NVivo results. The comparison and analysis suggested the following eleven emergent themes:

- Being minority implies feeling different;
- Being minority is perceived as negative;
- There is a lack of African American representation among instructors and staff;
- There is a lack of Black History and African American Studies in the curriculum;
- Black people are not liked;

- There is discomfort being enrolled in History classes because they do not capture the totality of the African American experience;
- There is a negative perception about African Americans;
- There are professors who treat African Americans unfairly, showing preferential treatment to Whites;
- There is a need for African American peer groups or advisory groups;
- There is a need for African American tutors; and
- There is a need for focused African American financial assistance.

The emergent themes were further analyzed revealing three primary themes categorized as follows: Representation, Support, and Race. These primary themes connect directly with CRT. For example, Representation aligns with representation with interdisciplinary because CRT and its interdisciplinary tenet closely relate to the study of African American males in community college in that college is acutely a social environment that draws from “ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, history, humanities, and law to develop an enhanced understanding of students of color’s experiences in higher education” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). Similarly, representation with interdisciplinary considers the cross-cultural nature of U. S. higher education environments (Niculescu et al., 2015; Wood & Harris, 2017; Wood et al., 2015). Next, the Support theme is representative of the CRT tenet support with challenge to dominant ideology. The students in this study expressed a need for a nontraditional student support system that reflected racial diversity; similar to the challenge to neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy in society advanced by CRT (Critical Race as a Methodology, 2015). Last, Race, the third primary theme, correlates with the CRT tenet race with centrality of race. Unfortunately, there remains a systemic inefficiency of community colleges in facilitating degree attainment of

African American males that is parallel to the implicit biases of U.S. society (Harper, 2015). When compared to the five generally accepted CRT tenets, the three primary themes—Representation, Support, and Race—are aligned to form the results of the study. The primary themes are further discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter Summary

This chapter aligned the research data, the analysis, and the emerging themes as expressed through semistructured interviews with second-year, African American male community college students. I interviewed six students and coded the manuscripts. The initial coding revealed 11 emergent themes which were recoded using NVivo revealing three primary themes—Representation, Support, and Race—that connected the CRT tenets of representation with interdisciplinary, support with challenge to dominant ideology, and race with centrality of race. Making these connections allowed me to look at critical issues of racial justice, equity, and access in the field of education (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019). With the primary themes serving as a foundation, Chapter 5 consists of an in-depth discussion of the key findings, answers to the research questions, implications for practice, administrator recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative narrative case study was to explore how AAMCCSs perceive their race, social status, and instructional learning modalities within their college setting to assess if these students' perceptions have utility as predictors of degree attainment for African American males attending community college. This research documents the views and experiences of six AAMCCSs and highlights their perceptions of their interactions with their classmates, counselors, advisors, and department administrators. CRT, which looks at critical issues of racial justice, equity, and access in education (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019), was used as the theoretical framework of this research study.

The study consisted of semistructured interviews that were conducted via Zoom; then, transcribed and analyzed to identify 11 emergent themes. The emergent themes were further explored, revealing three primary themes: Representation, Support, and Race. Then, within the context of the three most relevant CRT tenets—the centrality of race, intersectionality, and challenge to dominant ideology—connections were made to the three research questions:

RQ1: What learning modalities and additional support measures give the second-year African American male community college student the most significant opportunity for degree attainment?

RQ2: How does status attainment impact the academic persistence of second-year African American male community college students?

RQ3: What do second-year African American male community college students perceive as institutional barriers to degree attainment?

Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the study. The chapter consists of five sections: (a) discussion of primary findings, (b) implications of the study, (c) limitations of the study, (d) recommendations for further study, and (e) the summary.

Discussion of Primary Findings in Relation to Past Literature

Three primary themes were identified in the data analysis as (a) Representation (b) Support, and (c) Race. These themes summarize the views advanced by the participants and their perspectives can be used to enlighten future generations of AAMCCSs as well as the college administrators, campus staff, and faculty members charged with providing them guidance (Harper, 2013). This section of the study contains the discussion of the themes in connection with the previously reviewed literature, the CRT framework, and within the context of the research questions. The section is organized according to the three primary themes which are presented in conjunction with their associated research question. Explanation of the themes is based on this researchers' interpretations and their association to the literature.

Representation

RQ1: What learning modalities and additional support measures give the second-year African American male community college student the most significant opportunity for degree attainment?

As noted in Chapter 3 of this study, acceptance into a different set of societal norms, feelings of self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging are all interdisciplinary identity functions that impact the AAMCCS's rates of persistence, attrition, and eventual degree attainment (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Along those same lines, I found that the participants' responses mirrored a desire for belonging—representation—and for self-efficacy. Whereas, the interdisciplinary tenet supposes that learning results from a

mixture of academic disciplines, I discovered that the respondents perceived that their environments lacked diversity. They routinely spoke of a need for a separate set of African American role models and mentors at the community college. Sidney spoke of seeing people that “looked like him.” This aligns with Bandura’s social learning theory (1977), which asserts that human behavior (learning) is a product of observation, imitation, and modeling. Another interesting discovery was that this group of African American males continually reflected on ways to increase the likelihood of degree attainment for others. They enunciated a perceived benefit in early interventions, especially with middle-school and high-school African American males, and focused diversity hiring. Repeatedly, these students spoke of racial consciousness, not of prejudice or other stereotypical forms of cultural division. What also resonated was their sense of being overlooked and misunderstood. This speaks to the essence of this report, to present to college administrators and faculty the AAMCCSs’ perceptions of race and his vision for degree attainment.

As viewed through the prism of representation with interdisciplinary, the community colleges in this study are segregated systems “controlled by people other than those that go there” (West, 1995, p. 128). However, the perceptions and perspectives voiced by the students in this study reflect a different view; these students envision a desegregated academic system with an interdisciplinary knowledge base that, according to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), expands the study of ethnicity, sociology, history, humanities, and law to include the experiences of students of color—of African American males. Most importantly, when considering CRT and its representation with interdisciplinary tenet (acceptance into a different set of societal norms, feelings of self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging), within the context of second-year African American male community college students, I found that these research participants embraced

the challenges within their learning environment and, enroute to degree attainment, found themselves as a catalyst for institutional reform.

However, in as much as the data suggest that additional support measures have significance with respect to African American male community college degree attainment, the data do not support a similar link based on learning modality. In fact, Gilbert and Heller (2013) and Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) exclaimed that scholarly and administrative efforts that focus on personal narratives serve far greater benefit for underrepresented people. Along those same lines, when asked about teaching techniques that encouraged participation, teaching techniques most effective as related to academic success, and classroom factors that contribute to the success of African American male students, all respondents answered differently.

In line with the data and prior literature (Ingram & Coaxum, 2018; Wood & Turner, 2011), I contend that the form of instructional modality used in the classroom, generally, does not contribute an increase in African American degree attainment. Furthermore, this finding is upheld by the literature and aligns with the interdisciplinary tenet of CRT, which considers the cross-cultural nature of U.S. higher education environments (Niculescu et al., 2015; Wood & Harris, 2017; Wood et al., 2015). Accordingly, Wood and Turner (2011) asserted that positive improvements to classroom conditions and the African American male learning experience included faculty members who “were friendly with students from the onset; checked in on student academic progress; listened to student concerns; [were] proactive in addressing performance issues; and encouraged students to succeed” (p. 143). Therefore, in answer to RQ2, the research affirms that these students perceived additional learning supports, not instructional modality, as contributing value to AAMCCSs’ persistence and degree attainment.

Support

RQ2: How does status attainment impact the academic persistence of second-year African American male community college students?

Given that CRT forms the framework for this study, it bears repeating that all ideologies are open to challenge and change should the situation warrant (Torres, 2013). Moreover, Allen (2011) propounded that individual differences matter for communications to be successful and social identity to thrive. In examining the CRT tenet support with challenge to dominant ideology, this study documented the challenges these AAMCCSs experienced and how those challenges influenced their perceptions of their academic culture and student support systems. Hence, the data in this section support the finding that these students' perception of status (of self, of how others view them, and of self within the context of socioeconomic reality) aligns with the support with challenge to dominant ideology tenet of CRT. Additionally, as gleaned from the participants' responses to additional probing questions, the research affirms that this group of AAMCCSs did not observe an institutional commitment to address their needs, wants, and desires to make dedicated improvements to their academic learning environment.

When considering the perspectives and the frame of reference of people of color, we give them a voice to question and challenge established ideologies (Delgado, 1995). Chickering and Reisser (1993) maintained that student development programs and services should be viewed from the student's perspective. Agreeing with these authors, and as viewed through the lens of second-year African American male community college students, I found that the support with dominant ideology tenet of CRT and Chickering and Reiser's three service clusters model have intersecting value. For example, when asked to describe the challenges they faced as AAMCCSs, the data suggest that there exists a need for additional assistance with enrollment: selecting the

correct classes, understanding degree requirements, and establishing direction and a pathway to success. Leon insinuated that these programs demonstrate how the school values them. Also reflecting on status and self-worth, Chadwick maintained that student support programs have the potential to mentally prepare students for the path ahead. Accordingly, in addition to addressing RQ2, the findings fit into the existing literature and suggest that those students who are afforded institutionally proactive entering, supporting, and culminating services are more apt to realize higher attainment rates (Chickering et al., 1989). Also, in relation to the research question, the data show that AAMCCSs strongly perceive enrollment, financial aid, and academic skills and prior learning assessments as having significant impact on their perception of self, of how others view them, and of self within the context of the socioeconomic environment.

Transitioning to the premise of support with challenge to dominant ideology, I assert that longheld and current ideologies of African American male retention and attainment still require challenge. The data show that what resonated with AAMCCSs and what most influenced feelings of positive social status was a desire for schools to provide dedicated student support services which, to a reasonable extent, consist of staff that look like them. Their cry for representative learning environments might be compared to similar historical challenges. For example, the “separate but equal” doctrine was upheld in 1896; but a persistent challenge to the dominant ideology led to its reversal in 1954 with the *Brown v. Board of Education* case (Purdy, 2018). Similarly, the data advance a detailed analysis of the experiences of AAMCCSs. Their experiences, as articulated by Solórzano et al. (2000), provide counterstories to the dominant cultural viewpoint.

Race

RQ3: What do second-year African American male community college students perceive as institutional barriers to degree attainment?

In explaining CRT in education, DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2019) propounded that protest and challenges to White privilege is the basis for the CRT tenet: race with centrality of race. Accordingly, this study, which examined African American male perceptions of race as a barrier to degree attainment, took an additional step to emphasize the centrality of race with respect to the education of AAMCCSs. Hence, the investigatory instruments used in this study were designed to seek out actionable solutions to the declining retention and attainment rates of AAMCCSs. DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2019) and Lynn and Jennings (2009) expressed that approaching CRT research as a problem-posing, solution-querying event helps to develop understandings about what factors support the efficacy of race and education in African American male development.

There are consequences to how African American males are treated in community colleges, and there are both real and perceived impacts. Real impacts, measures of academic success and student retention, might be gathered via test and varying assessment tools. However, for these African American males, their perceived impacts are their reality. For instance, Barack expressed not wanting to be judged as the “angry Black man” and often feeling like he was a representative of the entire Black race. Of course, that was not the case; but, from a problem-solving perspective, Barack’s perception warrants consideration. Also, when asked if there were any specific challenges he experienced as an African American male student, Nelson reported a perception that African American males are seen as unintelligent and unable to attain a degree.

Data gained from the participant interviews repeatedly pointed these African American males perceiving racial biases in their education and educational experience.

Additional probing questions provided data that highlighted the impact of those perceived biases on degree attainment. Leon stated that institutional barriers contributed to him failing classes and at one point he did not want to continue. Nelson expressed a perception that African American males are required to take more remedial/introductory courses than other ethnicities and this contributed to higher educational cost associated with having to take more classes, ultimately contributing to degree completion timelines in excess of four years for a two-year degree. Last, when asked if there was a clear institutional commitment to address the retention of African American males at your community college, 83% of the research participants answered, “No.” Consequently, from a problem-posing, solution-seeking perspective, based on the counterstories told by this group of students, the data support the perception that, at the community college level, there are institutional barriers to African American male degree attainment. While CRT helps to explain how race-driven actions become normalized (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), this research takes the next step by highlighting data related to the African American-male-centric problem and then offers specific degree attainment solutions that administrators could begin to institute.

Implications of the Study

While assessing the participant’s responses to the questions regarding race, I noticed that the theme of Agency was being repeated. Agency, as discussed by Cole (2021), is the personal perception within the context of individual empowerment. In that same vein, Bentley-Edwards and Chapman-Hillard (2015) held that agency has significance given that it is manifested in a sense of empowerment to engage in change; hence, agency influences student academic success.

I further contend that the agency of African American males might also influence their assimilation on America's college campuses. Accordingly, the findings of this research may be used by college administrator to assist African American males in positively perceiving their racial agency, their social agency, and how they assimilate within a positive, cohesive context and not within the scope of coercive discouragement (Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hillard, 2015). Mameli et al. (2021) described student agency as asking questions, sharing opinions, and engaging in oppositional initiatives. Accordingly, increased feelings of empowerment lead to increased student engagement (Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hillard, 2015) and improved degree attainment.

The data garnered from this study align with current literature with respect to a continued need for innovative options that address student success initiatives that heed the desire of AAMCCSs to have their perspectives heard and their opinions considered. Accordingly, increased feelings of empowerment lead to increased student engagement (Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hillard, 2015) and improved degree attainment. Additionally, the data suggest that community colleges might achieve increased African American male persistence and attainment if they broaden their discussions of cross-cultural collaboration, diversity, equity, and inclusion; and, incorporate the interdisciplinary perspective, challenge to dominant ideology, and centrality of race tenets of CRT in their strategic plans.

Limitations

This study was presented based on the assumption that further analysis was warranted to address the gap in African American male student achievement. Accordingly, in examining the perceptions of race, social status attainment, and the impact of instructional learning modalities on AAMCCSs, five limitations were present.

The first limitation involved the small sample size of the African American male community college student participants. The small sample might suggest that the findings are based on weak data that led to generalizations that may or may not be applied to the broader community college community of African American male students. Minimizing this limitation relied on triangulation utilizing member checks, hand-coding, and then recoding using NVivo. Previous literature was also used to support the finding of this study.

The second limitation was the COVID-19 pandemic. The protocols enacted by the colleges in this study influenced our interview interactions, how the participants interacted in their in-person and online learning environments, and the societal influences of this period. That said, the shift to online learning negatively influenced their focus, levels of anxiety, and placed additional burdens on familial circumstances. Participant recruitment was also impacted by the pandemic. After multiple email solicitation (see Appendix B) that occurred over six months, the sample size was limited to six participants.

The third limitation is that this study was heavily influenced by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. BLM began as an online movement in 2013 in response to the fatal shooting of unarmed African American teenager Trayvon Martin and expanded when two other unarmed African American males were killed by police the following year. I contend that the socioemotional effect the BLM movement, reflected verbatim in transcribed interviews, impacted African American male students' perceptions of status, empowerment, and perception of justice and fairness. For instance, Barack mentioned that he preferred to not interact at times, because he did not want his comments to lead to him being labeled as "the angry Black man."

The fourth limitation of this study involved the design of the interview protocol. My interview notes outlined the need for a more in-depth introductory and follow-up conversation

with the participants. These conversations would have provided clarity to comments and insinuations that were articulated by the students.

The fifth limitation addresses the participants' understanding of instructional modalities. Lectures and engaging activities were the predominant responses when asked their desired teaching techniques in relation to classroom participation and academic success. Inasmuch as I attempted to provide examples and to elaborate on the functional efficacy of various instructional modalities, the data suggest that the participants lacked a foundational understanding of instructional modality, which, in turn, limited their ability to advance a fruitful response.

Recommendations

The limitations of this research and the interpretations of the participants' degree attainment perceptions revealed several recommendations, which I divided into two categories: practical application and future research. The recommendations for practical application present suggestions that may benefit current members of the academic community. Conversely, the recommendations for future research reflect literary gaps that scholars might explore to expand the breadth of knowledge spotlighting African American male degree attainment.

Recommendations for Practical Application

Reflecting on the intent for this research to provide insight into the viewpoints of AAMCCSs, the first recommendation for practical application is for higher education administrators to foster learning environments that encourage the development of positive racial and social agency (Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hillard, 2015). Inviting students from diverse populations to express their personal perceptions of race and social identity, within the context of individual empowerment and not within the scope of coercive discouragement, improves student engagement (Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hillard, 2015; Cole, 2021). Next, the decision makers ensure that their college's vision and mission makes connections to the degree attainment

perceptions identified in this study. These actions will contribute to a positive learning environment for AAMCCSs. Galliot and Graham (2014) held that administrators could use individual perceptions of agency as a predictor of persistence, engagement, and attainment.

Another theme which reverberated throughout this study was a need for academic programming that addresses all the stages of the community college experience. Thus, the second recommendation for practical application is for schools, when developing student support strategies, to engage in problem-solving endeavors that include wraparound services that, while being inclusive of the needs of this student population, are also sensitive to the socioemotional impact. This is important because these students' perceptions of status directly relates to their retention. As mentioned by Allen (2011), their perceptions of status, a form of social conditioning, overrides their reality and implicit stereotyping prevails.

The third recommendation for practical application is for community colleges to implement proactive and transparent hiring initiatives that recruit African American males into all levels of the organization. Vega et al. (2010) commented that a school's hiring strategies ought to be reflective of its constituent communities and student population. Similarly, it is recommended that these hiring efforts have follow-on goals that seek to ensure that advancement pathways are provided, thus ensuring that the next generation of AAMCCSs have an opportunity to *connect* with a staff that "looks like them."

Recommendations for Future Research

Chapters 3 and 5 presented gaps in the literature expressed as limitations. Conversely, this section reintroduces several of those gaps as recommendations for future research. I assert that future analyses would gain insight into the academic needs of AAMCCSs within the context of educational support services.

The current body of knowledge benefits from future research that assesses how African American males, who have successfully completed a postsecondary degree, are perceived in the workplace by members of leadership who have not attained a degree. This next-level inquiry would allow researchers to examine if unspoken prejudices and an invisible ceiling exists and how these barriers impact the career development of African American males. If given the chance to talk with his school leaders, Chadwick said that he would ask if they could help bridge the gap between degree attainment and job placement. Moreover, this type of comparative study might take a multitiered look into CRT in the workplace and the relevance of culturally sensitive supports.

Additional future research should explore what colleges are doing to reach African American males earlier in the K-12 track. Interestingly, Barack advanced a similar thought—he wondered why colleges are not reaching back to the middle- and high-school African American male. Along this same vein of providing a reach back presence and in response the perceptions propounded in this study, the data support the need for future research that reviews if a degree attainment interdependency exists between pre-college interventions and an African American centric cadre.

Furthermore, additional data could be gathered that expands on the impacts of placement testing, remedial courses, and college preparatory classes as it relates to African American male collegiate learning capability and willingness to seek academic assistance. Barack said that, in general, African American males do not have the benefit of preparatory classes, and therefore, do not have the requisite skills to compete on a basic level. Accordingly, Leon felt that if students could take preparatory classes in high school that would lead to improvement in placement scores, it would decrease the need to take remedial courses in college. As further evidence that

future research is warranted, according to Chen (as cited in Sanabria et al., 2020), less than 50% of community college students who enroll in remedial courses ultimately pass.

Conclusion

This qualitative dissertation explored if the perception of race, status, and instructional modality, as viewed through the lens of AAMCCSs, have utility as predictors of degree attainment. The study focused on two community colleges located in the Crossroads region of Texas. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What learning modalities and additional support measures give the second-year African American male community college student the most significant opportunity for degree attainment?

RQ2: How does status attainment impact the academic persistence of second-year African American male community college students?

RQ3: What do second-year African American male community college students perceive as institutional barriers to degree attainment?

The findings revealed eleven emergent themes that were further analyzed, revealing three primary themes categorized as follows: Representation, Support, and Race. When compared to the five generally accepted CRT tenets and the students' perceptions as gleaned from semistructured interviews, the primary themes aligned to form the discussion of the study: representation with interdisciplinary, support with challenge to dominant ideology, and race with centrality of race. An analysis of the data revealed the following:

- The research participants embraced the challenges within their learning environment and considered themselves judged as a representative of the African American male; and as such, a catalyst for institutional reform.

- Additional support services contributed to retention and eventual degree attainment, but instructional modality held no significance.
- The research revealed that while the student generally did not experience overt racism, they still perceived institutional barriers to degree attainment grounded in implicitly biased interactions on campus.
- The results directly contribute to the field of research involving retention and degree attainment of African American males by highlighting the psychosocial (Stage & Hubbard, 2012) and agential impacts (Mameli et al., 2021) of how the perceived their learning environments.
- Status, as it relates to a student's perception of self, perception of how others view him, and perception of self within the context of economic and social status contributes to academic persistence and degree attainment of AAMCCSs. Status is also influenced by the cultural competence and its willingness to affect improvements displayed by the school (Sprague, 2009).

There is a level of disproportionality perceived by AAMCCSs. They realize that attaining a college degree is ultimately their responsibility; and, notwithstanding the barriers they continue to experience at all levels of society, they remain optimistic that they will succeed academically. Moving forward, college administrators should keep in mind that African American male community college student only ask that their counterstories be heard and acted upon, one student at a time. After all, as stated by the participant Barack, "To save the whale, does it mean to screw the dolphins?" No, it doesn't.

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Appendix A: ACU IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885



May 11, 2021

Roderick C. Lewis, Sr.
Department of Organizational Leadership
Abilene Christian University

Dear Rod,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "A Qualitative Case Study on Race, Status, and Instructional Modalities as Predictors of Degree Attainment for African American Males",

(IRB# 21-058) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix B: Email Solicitation

Dear Student,

Hello my name is Roderick Lewis, and I am doctoral candidate at Abilene Christian University. I am conducting research, on the perceptions of African American males attending community colleges. Specifically, I am exploring the African American males' experiences around topics race, status, and instructional modalities as potential predictors to degree attainment and completion.

As potential participant, I am requesting community college students to engage in a brief online interview conducted via ZOOM. The scheduled interviews will last between 30-45 minutes and will be arranged and coordinated to fit your schedule. As appreciation for your time, those students will be provided a \$35 gift card to use on Amazon.com.

If you are willing to volunteer to participate in this study, please review the Informed Consent Form by clicking the **INFORMED CONSENT link** or **scanning the QR Code** below. After reviewing the Informed Consent Form, please check the **I CONSENT** box. Checking this box serves as your electronic consent and acknowledges that you: (1) understand the study as described, (2) have been given a copy of the description as outlined above, (3) are 18 years of age or older, and (4) agree to participate.

Next, you will be prompted to answer 10 Demographics Questions that will be used to collect demographic information and identify prospective research candidates. The Informed Consent Form and Demographics Questions will take less than 10 minutes to complete. Once you have consented and responded to the demographics questions, you may or may not be contacted to participate in a Zoom interview. **Click the INFORMED CONSENT link or scan the QR Code**

[INFORMED CONSENT LINK](#)



I look forward to learning about your community college experiences and extend my sincerest appreciation for your willingness to participate in my study.

Sincerely,

Roderick C. Lewis Sr.
Doctoral Candidate
Abilene Christian University
xxxxxx@acu.edu
xxx-xxx-xxxx

Appendix C: Research Questionnaire

Abilene Christian University-Spring 2021

A Qualitative Case Study on Race, Status, and Instructional Modalities as Predictors of Degree Attainment

Purpose of study: To explore the perspectives of male, second-year, African American community college students with regards to degree attainment.

The following questions are designed to collect demographic information and identify prospective research candidates. This questionnaire will take less 15 minutes to complete.

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Race/Ethnicity:
4. Are you currently enrolled in your community college? (yes or no)
5. Have you completed two semesters at your community college? (yes or no)
6. Are you aware that African American males historically achieve lower academic success rates in college? (yes or no)
7. Have you had academic success conversations with counselors, advisors, or administrators at your college? (yes or no)
8. Do you have views on improving African American male degree completion? (yes or no)
9. May I contact you for follow-up? (yes or no)

* Email address: _____

* Phone Number: _____

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Researcher Comments:

Before I begin the interview, I'd like to briefly review the procedure that we will be following today and remind you of your rights as a participant. This interview will less than 30 minutes. If follow-up questions are needed after the transcription of this interview, I will reach out to you and schedule another interview at a time of your choosing.

Please remember:

- Your participation is completely voluntary
- You may refuse to answer any question during this interview
- You may withdraw from the study completely
- I will keep all identifying information confidential
- I will protect the identity of you and your college
- There are minimal risks to your participation in this study.
- There are no right or wrong answers, answer based on your perspective
- I will be taking notes during this to be used in my dissertation.
- If we lose connection just log back in.
- Depending on what information you provide, some questions may seem repetitive.
- Lastly, PLEASE SPEAK LOUDLY. This will ensure that I correctly capture this conversation.

The topics covered in this interview all surround your perceptions (either beliefs or observations) as it pertains to an African American Male attending community college.

* Topic covered are **RACE, STATUS, INSTRUCTIONAL MODALITIES, AND DEGREE ATTAINMENT**

Now that I have covered both the procedure that will be used and your rights as a participant, as well as the topic areas, do you still agree to participate?

Thank you.

I will now start the recording.

The first set of questions relate to your perceptions of race:

Race

1. Describe to me the challenges you face as an African American male community college student? How does this impact you academically?

2. On your campus, have you observed racism towards African American male students? How did that experience affect or influence you?
3. What might your community college do to increase the value of your collegiate experience?
4. Do you believe the placement test accurately evaluates your college readiness in Reading, Mathematics, and Writing? Are there other assessment methods better suited to evaluate your academic abilities?

Now we will talk about your perceptions of status:

Status

1. Do you participate in student success courses such as freshman orientations, student life skills, or remedial learning programs at your college?
2. Either socially or academically, who do you consider your peers? Do you feel pressured to balance academic achievement and peer acceptance?
3. In what way does your past influence your ability to succeed in community college?
4. Do you feel socially connected on campus? If necessary, *ask student to please elaborate*
5. Please explain how your financial status and family environment influences your academic pursuits.

Next, we will transition to discuss your perceptions of Instructional Modalities:

Instructional Modalities

1. During your first year of study, what teaching technique (such as lecture, discussion, group work, debate, audiovisual, hands on, teaching others, reading, or something else) encouraged you to participate in the classroom?
2. In your opinion, which teaching technique(s) is most effective as it relates to the academic success of African American males? *If necessary, ask why.*
3. Tell me what other classroom factors contribute to your success as an African American male student.

4. Have you used success coaches, tutoring, or mentoring at your college?
 - a If not, what's the reason you didn't?
 - b If so, would you mind sharing which experiences are most meaningful to you?
5. Do you feel intellectually challenged at your community college? What class or classes do you find most fulfilling; and why?
6. Does your college use Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media platform to deliver information to, solicit feedback from, or prompt interactions with African American male students?

Now, before we end, I like to hear your views on Degree Attainment:

Degree Attainment

1. Is there a clear institutional commitment to address the retention of African American males at your community college?
2. If given the chance to talk with your school leaders, what are questions you would ask regarding male African American degree attainment?
3. Are there any specific challenges you experience as an African American male student?
4. What activities, services, and/or programs support the advancement of African American male students at your community college?
5. In terms of increasing graduation rates, what would an African American male student support system look like for you?
6. Explain the value that student success courses such as freshman orientations, student life skills, or remedial learning programs might have on African American retention.

Close of Interview:

This concludes our interview.

- Stop recorder
- Ask if the participant would like to receive a transcription of the interview
- Confirm any contact information in the event that a follow-up interview is needed

Thank you for your participation in my research study!