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Unfit for Slavery: A Qualitative Exploration of African American Male Perceptions of Persistence and Academic Achievement at a Midwest Public Community College

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Unfit for Slavery: A Qualitative Exploration of African American Male Perceptions of Persistence and Academic Achievement at a Midwest Public Community College

by

LaVada Rebecca Rice

May 5, 2023

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

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LaVada Rebecca Rice

This Dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education Lindenwood University, School of Education

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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

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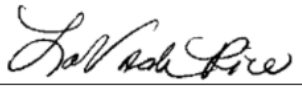
Signature:  Date: 5/5/2023

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If it had not been for my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, this manuscript would not have been possible. *I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength* (Philippians 4:13). A lot of prayer provided me with comfort and peace. *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.* (Philippians 1:6)

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Abstract

While African American males enrolled in community colleges, persistence and graduation rates remained low compared to all other demographics. Educational literature and research examining the performance of African American male students in community colleges was scarce (Bush & Bush, 2010). The most recent research focused on African American male students in the community college systems was 2010 (Harris & Wood, 2013) and focused on ways to keep African American male students enrolled. Ignoring the socio-ecological factors can affect decisions to stay enrolled. The researcher believed examining institutional and socio-ecological influences might be necessary to improve the persistence and academic achievement of African American male students. To clarify African American male students' perceptions, a closer examination of strategies that promote academic achievement may be useful.

Keywords: academic achievement, African American male student, community college, persistence, Black male initiatives, phenomenology, Self-Determination Theory, Prove-Them-Wrong- Syndrome, Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model, and African American Male Theory

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Chapter One: Introduction

Frederick Douglass was a fascinating individual and educational thinker who was a proponent of equal educational achievement and a catalyst against slavery. Douglass' approach to education represented what one could accomplish with perseverance (Douglass & Garrison, 1849). This researcher's study centered around the internal and external strategies African American male students implemented to facilitate persistence and academic achievement in a Midwest public community college system. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2019, 28% of Black men aged 25 to 29 had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 30% of Black women and over 40% of white men, and nearly half of white women (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021). A more significant gap existed within higher education, where half as many Black men as White men had a master's degree. African American men in the American higher education system were disproportionally underrepresented (NCES, 2020). The NCES study indicated ecological barriers and institutional dilemmas African American men faced during matriculation through the community college system.

Background of the Study

An exploration of higher education studies indicated racial disparities decreased students' completion and retention rates. In response to low completion rates, educators, reformers, policymakers, and foundations called for a concerted effort to increase the number of individuals with college degrees and certificates, an effort frequently referred to in the literature as the "completion agenda" (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). The Obama administration, the Lumina Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation called for ambitious increases in college graduates by the mid-

2020s (Bailey, 2017). The success of President Obama's initiative required changing patterns of movement, maintenance, and instructive accomplishment for African American males, since schools could not improve graduation rates without addressing the accomplishment disparities for ethnic minorities.

The U.S. government and multiple foundations funded extensive research and reform portfolios (Bailey, 2017). Cultural shifts in response to financial and societal pressures altered the educational development of potential students. The pursuit of the American Dream necessitated a college degree (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). Women and African Americans were denied opportunities, due to society's association of education with preeminence, power, and prosperity (Miller Solomon, 1985). As one of the dominant societal influences, higher education had long been perceived as a pathway to personal and global success.

Persistence and graduation rates of African American students were topics of discussion among national, state, and educational leaders. African American male students' enrolled in postsecondary education completion rate, was significantly below all other races (Shapiro et al., 2018). While many colleges and universities do seek to improve the persistence, retention, degree attainment, and academic achievement rate of underserved Black males. Yet, African American male students still face enormous obstacles, especially socio-economically and academic disadvantages that impede academic achievement and must fight society's negative stereotyping (McManus, 2017). Substantial obstacles to equal educational opportunities for African American college students further widened the achievement gap between African Americans and Caucasians (McFarland et al., 2019).

Community colleges enrolled nearly half of the students in public undergraduate programs and a disproportionate number of first-generation, low-income, underprepared, and minority students (Bers & Schuetz, 2014). Despite the exceptionally high number of students enrolled in a large Midwest, two-year institution (Institutional Research and Planning, 2019), there was a pronounced scarcity of African American male students participating in postsecondary education. As a result, African American male learners faced difficulties, often hindering an ability to succeed in higher education. Additionally, African American male students were disproportionately affected by low academic success and negative college experiences (Farmer & Hope, 2015).

Higher education prepared students for worldwide transformation transcending generations. For President Obama's arrangement to succeed, the United States needed to modify the Common Core State Standards models of persistence, retention, and academic achievement for African American male students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). The researcher concluded institutions could not increase graduation rates without addressing the achievement gap for ethnic minorities, especially African American men.

Theoretical Framework

African American male students struggled to persist and achieve academically for various reasons. Some theorists pointed to the difference between persistence and achievement rates among the population, versus students of the same gender and other ethnicities. In addition, African American male students were more affected by the external environment than social integration variables (Harris & Wood, 2014). Therefore, the African American Male Theory (AAMT; Bush & Bush, 2013) identified specific

strategies African American male students used to facilitate persistence and academic achievement. The motivation for the research was to determine why African American male students struggled with postsecondary education. Various sources revealed African American male students as having the lowest enrollment, retention, stoppage, and completion in advanced education in the United States (NSC Research, 2017).

The primary theoretical framework for the study, AAMT, described by Bush and Bush (2013) as a multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary framework used to express the accounts of pre- and post-enslavement experiences in line with African American boys' and men's spiritual, psychological, social, and educational development and experiences. AAMT comprised six tenets that summarized the lives of African American boys and men based on an ecological systems model. Each system applied to the trajectory of African American boys and men within unique societal experiences. Ecological systems provided a natural and suitable framework for a comprehensive theory of African American males (Wood & Palmer, 2015). At the same time, the six tenets pertained to the trajectory of African American boys and men within the individuals' unique societal experiences.

This qualitative research study was a conclusive and comprehensive phenomenological exploration to capture the motivations of and expose the barriers encountered by African American men at a Midwest public community college. Moreover, AAMT presented a mix of historical culture and community consciousness aspects, which enabled critical analysis. Thus, AAMT was an appropriate conceptual framework to describe and analyze the interrelated structures, systems, and processes in dynamic and multidimensional environments, which influenced and shaped the

development, experiences, outcomes, and trajectories of African American boys and men (Bush & Bush, 2013).

Community colleges presented various options for postsecondary education, including job certifications, associate degrees, trade skills, personal interest opportunities, and transferring to four-year institutions (Wendt, 2018). As community colleges presented various personal and professional options, research recommendations explicitly focused on vulnerable students, namely African American men. African American male students had the lowest enrollment, retention, and completion rates in postsecondary education in the United States (NCES, 2020). Confronting the normalcy of student attrition in community colleges required an actionable agenda, focused on the factors that inhibited student persistence and academic achievement. Therefore, the study's findings provided information for developing a comprehensive, two-years-or-less-college completion initiative to close the six-year achievement gap for African American men at a two-year public institution.

The study also presented a comprehensive narrative of the position and trajectory of African American male students attending a Midwest public community college. The findings aided in understanding African American male students' perceptions and experiences using strategies focused on student persistence and academic achievement. The findings provided data for the institutions to implement progressive strategies for increasing student achievement and graduation rates for African American males. Understanding the strategies was associated with social inconsistencies, social anomalies, and the absence of cultivating healthy initiative choices. The researcher believed concentrating on African American male students was necessary, because the population

deserved to have a positive college experience, complete the academic experience successfully, and enter the workforce as well-rounded individuals.

Statement of the Problem

African American men encountered significant retention, persistence, and graduation challenges from higher education institutions. Completing a postsecondary degree was a vital means of future success for African American males in the United States. The "American Dream" can be realized through education, which opened doors to career advancement, financial gain, and expanded opportunities for racial equality (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). A college degree significantly influenced one's ability to access valuable life opportunities for upward mobility. A postsecondary degree increased lifetime earnings, and an individual was expected to earn 84% more than those with a high school diploma (Stephens et al., 2015, p. 2). Indicative of the concerns was a barrage of national collegiate completion initiatives focused on the need to assist more students in completing a postsecondary credential (Bergman et al., 2014). African American males' inclusion in postsecondary educational opportunities had become a topic of national policy and priority (Strayhorn, 2015). In a 2009 State of the Union address, President Obama challenged the nation to regain the country's status as the global leader with the highest proportion of postsecondary graduates worldwide by 2025. Two-year colleges provided a passage to degree attainment, promising careers, and family financial support. A growing need existed for more educated, well-rounded, career-driven individuals to respond to the complexities of an ever-evolving global economy.

African American and Latino men ranked at or near the bottom on most indicators of student success, including enrollment, persistence, achievement, engagement, and attainment (Harris & Wood, 2013). The specific problem of interest was determining the factors obstructing African American male students' persistence and success in achieving a certificate or associate degree or transferring to a four-year institution. Due to the continuous social and economic adversities faced by African American male students in the United States, the individual's experience in college was of significant concern and even more challenging for higher education institutions.

Although college completion was a fundamental measure of success, not all community college students attended to obtain a degree. Among first-time college students enrolled at a community college in 2010, 39% earned a certificate within six years and 78% of community college students who transferred to a four-year institution did so without first earning a degree or certificate. (Shapiro, 2018, p. 5). Black men (25.8%) had the lowest completion rates. Black men were more likely to stop-out at the end of the study period than to complete a credential (Shapiro et al., 2018, p. 23). Exploring why African American male students failed to persist and succeed at a community college was instrumental for educators and stakeholders to foster academic success. Addressing the disparity allowed more African American male students to experience long-range success, including employment opportunities and financial achievement.

The research was a means to explore what strategies and best practices African American male students used to facilitate persistence and academic achievement at a public Midwest community college. Analyzing the strategies for success contributed to a

comprehensive plan to remedy the deficits related to African American men's persistence and achievement. As a result, the researcher designed an academic degree completion plan taking African American male students from college matriculation to graduation to occupation. The plan was like a global-positioning system community colleges could strategically deploy at individual campuses. In addition, African American men were leaving college in substantial numbers; therefore, the researcher believed community college presidents needed to adopt initiatives proven successful to retain African American male students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the phenomenological study was to explore what strategies African American male students used to facilitate persistence and academic achievement at a Midwest public community college. First, the researcher analyzed the academic achievement level of African American men enrolled at a Midwest public community college. Second, the researcher explored African American male students' perceptions of the level of institutional assistance and the degree to which perceptions related to persistence. Finally, by exploring the institutional factors in conjunction with focusing on the students as the primary unit of study, the researcher showed the institutional challenges African American men faced attempting to matriculate successfully through a Midwest public community college system.

The participants of the study were 11 African American male students enrolled in a Midwest public community college who had not transferred from another institution. Participants must have matriculated at the institution part- or full-time for at least one semester. In-depth interviews with open-ended questions allowed for a broad range of

answers and encouraged unanticipated responses. The researcher also obtained email addresses from 25 community college professionals to validate the students' perspectives.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an electronic welcome and informed consent letter were sent to potential participants to summarize the investigation. The letter clarified any identified risks associated with participating and detailed the means of confidential data storage. Recipients had to review the letter and accept or reject the invitation to participate. In addition, the researcher obtained Institutional Review Board permission from Lindenwood University and the Midwest public institution. Data collection occurred during individual Zoom video and audio-recorded, in-depth semi-structured interviews using 11 open-ended questions aligned to the research questions.

After each interview, participants and professionals completed a freeform survey comprised of 12 questions, which allowed for data triangulation. The researcher read, transcribed, analyzed, and coded the interview and survey data, labeling and categorizing the material to identify similarities and differences. Common themes emerged in student perceptions of strategies for persistence and academic achievement within a community college setting. Results reported in the textual and visual formats showed the experiences, meanings, and essences, including the identified themes, anonymous excerpts from the interviews, and interpretation of the qualitative data.

The three guiding research questions were comprehensive to allow participants to present the meaning of personal lived perceptions and experiences of college. Therefore, the research questions guided the interview and survey questions, which yielded themes. The researcher utilized an individualized and direct method of questioning, probing participants' responses and observing individual reactions. Semi-structured interviews

were appropriate to uncover the participants' experiences and perspectives. The approach facilitated a fluid discussion and encouraged participants to expound on a unique set of perceptions and lived college experiences.

The interviews occurred virtually, via Zoom, and lasted 60 to 90 minutes. The findings presented a textual, structured description of the meanings and essences of the participants' experiences, including identifying themes, anonymous excerpts from the interviews, and interpreting the qualitative data.

Research Questions

The three research questions explored in this study were:

RQ1: What are the experiences of African American male students in a public Midwest community college?

RQ2: What are the perceptions and experiences of African American male students on persistence and academic achievement strategies in a public Midwest community college setting?

RQ3: What are administrators, faculty, and staff perceptions of African American male students' persistence and academic achievement strategies at a public Midwest community college?

Significance of the Study

The researcher constructed the study based on the lived experiences of Douglass and Garrison (1849), whose words epitomized the significance of educational persistence.

> Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. Now, said he, if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. …I now understood what had been to me a most

> perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. (p. 134)

Given the social and economic problems African American males faced in the United States, student experiences in college became a concern and challenge for higher education institutions (Farmer & Hope, 2015). Douglass asserted education was the pathway to freedom, especially for the Black man. The interviews addressed the resilience of African American male students, exploring the factors fostering persistence for academic achievement leading to degree completion. Identifying strategies for persistence and achievement among African American male students freed students from a perpetual cycle of spiritual, psychological, social, and educational enslavement.

At a two-year degree-granting institution, 62% of full-time undergraduate degree-seeking students returned (NCES, 2020, p. 167). Statistics on the persistence of African American male students in a community college appeared discouraging compared to other ethnic groups. Exploring students' perceptions of resilience to degree completion added to the limited literature on African American male students in a community college setting. The researcher adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach to understanding African American men's persistence and academic success, using the AAMT framework to explain the achievement disparity in higher education.

According to the NCES (2020), of the 3.2 million high school graduates in 2018, 2.2 million, or 69%, enrolled in college by the following October (p. 120) . Of that number, 37% self-identified as Black students and 33% as Black men. About 44% of high school graduates enrolled in four-year institutions, and 23% enrolled in two-year

institutions (McFarland et al., 2020, p. 120). The national college graduation rates showed a disproportionately low number of Black students who attended two-year public institutions (Shapiro et al., 2018). President Barack Obama initiated the national completion agenda and brought visibility and pressure to community colleges with completion rates of less than 25% for first-time and full-time African American students and even lower rates for part-time students (Bers & Schuetz, 2014, p. 168).

Exploring African American male students' strategies to persist and succeed at a community college provided data to support the advancement of campus-wide academic achievement. With increased success percentages, African American male students could achieve long-range goals, increase financial prosperity, and find better employment opportunities. The study also showed African American male students' educational, economic, social, generational, and racial conditions while attending community college.

African American men struggled to succeed in postsecondary education, lagging far behind other-race counterparts in retention. Since 2008, only 30% of Black Americans and 20% of Latinos aged 25 to 34 attained an associate degree or higher in the United States, compared to 49% of White Americans and 71% of Asian Americans (Jordan & Rideaux, 2018, p. 39). Various factors limited personal knowledge and access to consider postsecondary education, enroll in a degree program, and successfully earn a degree (Shapiro et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the capacity to respond and react to the urgency of commencing, continuing, and completing a college degree worked towards reducing the achievement gap for African American male students. Two-year college institutions provided a passage to degree attainment, trained careers, and family financial support. Additionally, college degree attainment fulfilled the need for more educated, well-

rounded, career-driven individuals to address the complexities of an ever-evolving global mercantile system (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014).

The research findings suggested persistence toward degree attainment could improve with immediate initiatives for African American male students. Fewer than one in four Black men who began community college postsecondary studies completed a degree or certificate, and approximately 61% dropped out within six years (Shapiro et al., 2018, p. 11). The researcher's specific interests in the study were the strategies African American male students employed to persist and academically achieve a certificate, associate degree, or transfer to a four-year institution. African American male students had the lowest completion rate (36.1%) of any race or ethnicity (Shapiro, 2018, p. 14). Considering African American male students' low attendance and graduation rates, understanding individual college experiences were challenging for higher education institutions. Community colleges benefited from recommendations to develop campus-based retention strategies for African American men (Jordan & Rideaux, 2018).

The promise of America as the land of opportunity was at risk, and the nation's children and grandchildren stood to lose (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). The universal concern was completion throughout the growing body of literature regarding African American male students. The findings contributed to developing a rigorous retention plan focused on African American male students to increase persistence and academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Community colleges fostered growth and development by exploring new ideas and interactions between diverse populations, with the capacity to reach many (Wendt, 2018).

A college degree made it possible for a more educated, well-rounded, and career-driven individual to meet the demands of a constantly changing global economy. Community college was the postsecondary gap-filler for students with learning, financial, and social constraints, such as cultural behavior, unpreparedness for college, generational gaps, and persistent racial perceptions. African American male students' persistence and academic achievement experiences offered an opportunity to consider the current policies governing higher education (Beatty & McElderry, 2018). By learning about African American men's perceptions of persistence and academic achievement strategies, community colleges could develop a core framework to improve African American male students' capacity for degree attainment.

The research contributed to developing a state of emergency plan to address two-year institutions' completion and retention rates. Institutional characteristics were specific to the location and convenience of the institution, open-access policies, expeditious services (e.g., admission, advising, and financial aid), academic quality, friendly campus climate, and access to support services (Wood & Harrison, 2014). As mentioned earlier, social barriers and community college stigma restricted the institutions' success in matriculating students to attain the American dream befitting a productive outcome. The significance of the study was the contribution to reducing social barriers within higher education reform.

The researched demographic of learners needed to be prepared for immediate entry into four-year institutions; the community college filled the education gap as a path to success (NCES, 2020). African American male students achieved the American dream despite the challenges and multigenerational barriers. Decision-makers needed to respond

to the demands of a constantly evolving educational system, and a need existed for more work on the institutions' role in fostering the persistence and achievement of Black men (Wang et al., 2018).

Definition of Terms

Academic achievement: Learned proficiency in basic skills and content knowledge (McCoy et al., 2005).

African American male: A male of African descent born in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

African American male theory (AAMT): A theoretical framework to articulate the societal position and trajectory of African American boys and men by drawing on and accounting for pre- and post-enslavement experiences while capturing the spiritual, psychological, social, and educational development and station (Bush & Bush, 2013).

Community college: Two-year schools that provide affordable postsecondary education as a pathway to a 4-year degree (Department of Homeland Security, 2020).

Chronosystem: Synonymous with chronological age; a frame of reference for studying psychological changes in aging individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Exosystem: One or more settings not involving the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that make a difference in the set containing the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Macrosystem: Emphasis on how cultural elements related to a child's development exist or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture, along with any belief systems or ideologies underlying such consistencies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Mesosystem: Comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (e.g., for a child: home, school, and neighborhood peer group; for an adult: family, work, and social life) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Microsystem: A pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in each set with physical and material characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Persistence: A continuance or repetition of a behavior, process, or activity despite cessation of the initiating stimulus (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Phenomenology: The study of human experiences and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experiences (Sokolowski, 2000).

Prove-Them-Wrong-Syndrome: A term offered as an explanation to better understand the phenomenon of persistence for the African-American males in the study (Moore et. al., 2003)

Retention: A measure of the rate at which a student persists through the first year of college and reenrolls for the next academic school year at the same institution (Williams, 2019).

Self-Determination Theory: An empirically derived theory of human motivation and personality in social contexts that differentiates motivation in terms of being autonomous and controlled (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model: A model for the primary factors affecting the success of men of color in community colleges, highlighting interactions between

societal, environmental, intrapersonal, and campus-based factors that influence student success outcomes (Harris & Wood, 2016).

Unfit for slavery: A term coined to describe how education prohibits African Americans from remaining enslaved. Douglas and Garrison (1849) asserted, “If you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave” (p. 132).

Limitations

This study, like all research, had some limitations. First, only a small number of participants were interviewed, providing a small sample of the target population. The study could only address each variation of the posed research questions, because of the small sample size. For instance, a significant limitation to the research's validity exists, because the research was completed virtually, due to a worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. As a student researcher, the inability to devote extended time on campus restricted contact with the student population. Further, the snowballing strategy could have been more successful, because it did not include the involvement of the entire community college system whose students were being targeted. The study suggests ways higher education institutions can be more effective at graduating African American male students, despite its limitations. Second, participants' cooperation, convenience, and availability during data collection were considered to minimize the research topic's reflection.

Thirdly, the accuracy of data collection may or may not have been a limitation of this study. Participants were encouraged to share their perceptions and experiences openly and honestly before and during the interview. Fourth, even though member

checking is part of the plan for the research, there may have been some uncertainty about how valuable it is and how important it is to this study. Fifth, qualitative researchers use surveys as data collection tools, so personal opinions and experiences may or may not have served as constraints. Finally, it is assumed that the study participants provided honest responses. Sixth was this researcher's gender: I am a Black female. It was possible that participants in the study might more easily have related to someone of the same gender and race. Lastly, community college professionals were asked to respond to African American male students' perceptions and academic achievement. Responses may have reflected exaggerations, fabrications, and false information. Additionally, the community college professionals' anonymous survey did not permit follow-up questions, better to understand their perspectives on African American male students. However, the researcher's information is authentic and reflects the data provided by participants.

Summary

At the time of the study, community colleges served a diverse population of students, due to the students' open-access status. Among other learners, African American students might perceive the institution as a gateway to a sustaining and fulfilling lifestyle for themselves and family members (NCES, 2020). However, barriers remained to African American male students' community college persistence and academic achievement. Black men at community colleges represented an important socio-cultural group with unique experiences, educational expectations, and goals (Wang et al., 2018). The community college student population showed significant racial and

ethnic disparities, indicating a pressing need to provide African American male students with the help to overcome challenges and achieve degree completion.

A close look at community college enrollment and completion rates, employment statistics, incarceration rates, and health issues among Black men revealed the problem studied extended beyond the individual and higher education related to social and economic justice (Jordan & Rideaux, 2018). The researcher explored barriers in the community college system and the students' strategies to persist and achieve academically and addressed institutional reform and essential components to provide a successful educational experience for African American male students. Amid growing competition and integration, higher education must prepare U.S. students for an ever-changing global economy.

The research provided information community college leaders could use to reduce challenges and unsuccessful practices and redevelop the fragmented community college culture. Students of all ages pursued progressive careers and lifestyles, while Black men's aspirations contributed to the educational success (Wang et al., 2018). African American male students' academic achievement and degree completion did not simply occur. Fundamental shifts in persistence and accomplishment required community colleges to reset the system, reinforced the institution's characteristics, and need to restructure the educational experiences of African American male students (Harrison, 2018). In the researcher's experience within higher education, the community college served as an academic gap filler for the American dream.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

The past lived experience of Frederick Douglass (1849), whose words epitomized the significance of educational persistence, served as the study's building block.

> Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. Now," said he," if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave…I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty--to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. (p. 134)

Community colleges appeared to the researcher an integral pathway of the higher education landscape. Being an African American male student in a community college meant the student would face various achievement obstacles, would need to address individual challenges, while encountering significant academic deficiencies. Practical education aimed to develop African American male students both better and more valuable in life and equip each student with increased measures for stability and sustainability. However, traditional measures of success needed to provide a holistic view of graduates' lives and demonstrate how graduates fare years after the community college experience (Gallup, 2018).

The purpose of the qualitative study was to explore African American male students’ perceptions of strategies of persistence and achievement in a Midwest public community college. The literature review concentrated on exploring and attempting to comprehend existing studies about African American males' persistence and academic achievement regarding higher education, specifically at the community college level. In

addition, the literature review focused on various inferences pertinent to the specific demographic of students. The review began with an overview of the community college's historical purpose, present challenges, and future resolutions of a community college system and the connection to African American male students. Next, the review concentrated on robust theoretical frameworks for examining African American men in college. The frameworks included literature from prior studies about phenomenology theory, self-determination theory, Prove-Them-Wrong Syndrome, Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model, and the African American Male Theory. Lastly, the literature review included research on the perceptions and role of community college professionals in addressing persistence and academic achievement for African American male students.

Several models and theories have been designed, adopted, and argued to comprehend better and explain college persistence and academic achievement. For years, the methods by which collegiate institutions examined college persistence and academic achievement have been to administer previously developed conventional theories and models as a part of numerous research investigations. Early researchers, such as Deci and Ryan (1985), who examined the self-determination theory (SDT), and Tinto's (1975) student integration model, reported on student persistence; subsequent researchers analyzed or provided alternate theories for discussion and review, which primarily focused on African American male students. Presenting models and theories applicable to the Black male experiences in post-secondary education was a particularly salient contribution to the scholarly literature (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Due to the increased number of African American male students enrolled in community college, the researcher termed the understanding as essential to address African American male students' perceptions and

academic achievement. Simply put, there was a significant difference between the persistence of White male students and African American male students (Wood & Palmer, 2015).

An exploration of the literature regarding African American male students' persistence and academic achievement in community colleges was limited but developing. The categories found in the literature review represented significant components identified with the persistence and academic achievement among African American male students at a Midwest public community college. Research for the literature review focused on full-text articles, books, reports, and peer-reviewed resources. Online searches were conducted using Lindenwood University Library and Google Scholar. Databases utilized included EBSCO host, ERIC, Pro-Quest, and SAGE Journals Online. Documentation for the literature review was compiled by searching for full-text articles, books, reports, and peer-reviewed articles in scholarly databases, using search terms such as community college persistence, African American male collegiate students, and community college achievement.

Historical Perspective of the American Community College

Community colleges in America, initially called junior colleges or two-year colleges, can be traced as far back as the Morrill Act of 1862 (the Land Grant Act), which extended access to public higher education. The development considered the inclusion in colleges and universities of a substantial majority of individuals denied access to or prohibited from higher education for different reasons (Thelin, 2019). Although the Morrill Act was innovative, admission was only granted to some. As a result, in 1890, the

Second Morrill Act was created to provide an opportunity for African Americans to attain a post-secondary education (Thelin, 2019).

Therefore, Joliet Junior College was the first American community college, founded in 1901 in Joliet, Illinois. Joliet Junior College was the oldest thriving existing public, two-year college (American Association of Community Colleges, n.d.). Junior college signified an institution whose essential mission was to deliver general and liberal education, promoting transfer and completion of the baccalaureate degree. Community colleges are a critical node in a network of institutions devoted to education and training. They send graduates to four-year colleges and universities. As a result, community colleges transformed into institutions for formative training, professional instruction, and proceeding training (Jacoby, 2019).

By 1915 more than 70 junior colleges existed in the United States (Pallardy, n.d.; Britannica, 2010, para. 2). In the early 1920s, there were more than 200 such schools, and the American Association of Junior Colleges (later American Association of Community Junior Colleges, AACC) was organized (Pallardy, n.d., para. 2). During the 1930s Great Depression, the AACC aided with the need for low-cost public higher education. Growth after the passage of World War II, G.I. Bill rapidly increased, intensified by a surge of returning veteran students seeking higher education and vocational training (Thelin, 2019). The unprecedented support for the education of returning veterans provided by the G.I. Bill was notably race-neutral. More than one million black men had served during World War II, and these men shared in eligibility for educational benefits (Picker, n.d., para. 1)

By the late 20th century, there were more than 1,200 junior colleges in the United States, with a total enrollment making up about 40% of all nationwide undergraduate enrollment (Pallardy, n.d., para. 2). In the fall of 2017, 16.8 million students were enrolled in public, two-year colleges. Some 8.9 million were White, 3.3 million were Hispanic, and 2.2 million were Black. Among Blacks, 33% were males (McFarland et al., 2019, p. 152).

Community colleges had been an essential contributor of opportunity and access for an increasing number of multigenerational, multicultural, low-income, and first-generation college students. Consequently, efforts focused more on enrolling a diverse group of students than on retaining them to completion through effective teaching and classroom intervention strategies (Holland, 2016). Fortunately for community colleges, the best strategies for closing student achievement gaps were the same strategies to diversify student populations, increase enrollment, improve retention and completion rates, and boost the financial viability of the college (Holland, 2016).

Although the research incorporated useful guidance information into best practice, the challenge lies in its all-encompassing and practical application in the areas of persistence and student success. Occasionally, persistence was included as a primary topic of discussion for African American male students (Lewis, 2012). African American male students appeared to the researcher as the campus' unicorn. As a result, the number of African American male students enrolled was typically emphasized to be significantly lower than white counterparts. The small percentages of Black males allowed entry into the institutions were usually considered by some to be the talented tenth (DuBois, 1903).

Unfortunately, the then-current condition of community colleges across the nation was challenged with system-wide revitalization to accommodate the persistence and success of African American male students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). In higher education, academic disparities persisted between African American Males and gender and ethnic counterparts (de Brey et al., 2019; Harper, 2012). Despite the historical trials and triumphs, community colleges needed to be restructured for new ages. Enrollment at the junior college level has been the educational gap filler. Nevertheless, in order to accommodate the significant shifts, particularly in the African American male population, community colleges must rethink their goals, procedures, policies, programs, and personnel.

Community Colleges Model of Choice

A college degree afforded students the opportunity to explore advanced and critical developing careers. Higher education had been a vital component in enriching and empowering productive members of society. By 2020, an estimated 35% of job openings required at least a bachelor's degree, and 30% required some college or an associate's degree (Carnevale et. al., n.d., p. 2). At the helm of political debates, community college graduates were distressed, due to secondary standardized placement assessments, a lack of understanding of the importance of junior college, and the political hindrances that plagued students and institutions (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). Forty percent of college students were enrolled at one of America's more than 1,100 community colleges, offering affordable tuition, open admission policies, and convenient locations. For many students, community colleges offered academic programs and an affordable route to a four-year college degree (Office of the Press Secretary, 2015, para.

4). From a reasonable viewpoint, persistence and cultivating success were best perceived as the aftereffect in which a student learned about various factors affecting efficacy after showing up at college.

Given the underperformance of African American males in community colleges, exploring approaches to improve academic success was critical (Community College Research Center, 2020). Based on the perception of the researcher, community colleges had been focused on enrollment, retention, and graduation, there was a relevant need to be more proactive in discovering methods to help increase student academic persistence and academic achievement, particularly among African American males. Moreover, some theorists inferred the difference between community college persistence of African American male students, versus other ethnicities of the same gender, was students were affected by the external environment more than by the social integration variables (Harris & Wood, 2014).

Historically, most post-secondary institutions had disproportionately excluded or underserved African Americans. Over decades, the influx of African American student enrollment and retention has gained the attention of national and state leaders and administrators in higher education (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). From our analysis of the limited data on Black community college students, we find that while Black students are disproportionately represented at community colleges, the system does not produce equitable outcomes (Camardell et. al., 2022). Community colleges were designed to meet the community's needs (Tschechtelin, 2012, as cited in Harewood, 2014), and African American males were an integral part of the community.

Little empirical evidence existed to delineate why African American males attended community colleges, as opposed to four-year institutions (Wood, 2014). The researcher perceived, the extent of literature on the overall community college student population illustrated academically challenged students capitalized on the "open-door" policies of community colleges, whereby prior educational performance was not considered in admission. Some students utilized community colleges as an opportunity to "restart" educational careers. In contrast, high-achieving high school students also attended community colleges; many of the students capitalized on low-cost educational programming to complete general education requirements for transfer (Wood, 2014). Community college course offerings were applied, directly relevant to the labor market and an integral choice factor.

Community colleges provided various opportunities to attain post-secondary credentials, including two-year degrees, workforce certifications, and continuing education credits (Wilson, 2014). Even though African American male students enrolled in a community college with similar or higher educational aspirations, just as other groups, students were more likely to earn certificates rather than an associate or baccalaureate degrees (Wilson, 2014). Students of color, in general, and African American males specifically, were more likely to seek post-secondary opportunities at two-year colleges (Wood, 2014). McGlynn (2014) noted community colleges needed to provide students the kind of care and attention received at elite institutions. For example, the mission of most community colleges was to assist underserved and underprepared students to succeed and offer a robust general education curriculum that provided the foundation and framework for later academic and professional success (Wood, 2014).

Because of the current economic conditions, record numbers of adult learners and nontraditional students returned to post-secondary and vocational programs to retool and remain competitive in today's workplace (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). Moreover, nationally, statistics predicted community college enrollment for students 25 years and older continued to increase at a higher rate than for traditional-age students (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). If the problem persisted, the potential adverse consequences was over eight million future Americans would not have opportunities and benefits available through educational resources (Wood, 2014). The need for improved lives and the future of fathers and heads of households will be minimized and using a system on which America relies heavily and regularly promotes; “go to school, get an education” will not have the same meaning for these individuals (Wood, 2014).

Therefore, some African American male students, academically qualified or otherwise, failed to take the necessary steps for four-year college enrollment, such as completing assessment exams and, as a result, attending community colleges (Wood, 2014). In addition, African American males were more likely to be placed in a developmental course and more likely to be suspended from college than any other race. Strayhorn (2015) suggested African American males were often seen as an at-risk population for education and were often referred to as an endangered species, reflecting a virtual absence in collegiate institutions. In contrast, African American males had a high overrepresentation within the juvenile justice system and prisons (Strayhorn, 2015).

Systemic barriers, such as prior enrollment in poor school districts, high middle and high school dropout rates, high rates of incarceration, high rates of homicide, and chronic health problems were noted as reasons for the low number of African American

men enrolled in community colleges (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). In addition, students from low socio-economic backgrounds and minorities often faced severe challenges in obtaining a college education (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). In some cases, first-generation minority college students were motivated to overcome family histories to achieve a college education (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014).

African American males who attended community colleges selected the institutions based on attaining a degree in a chosen field, the curriculum/coursework, job placement, availability of financial aid, and academic reputation (Wood & Harrison, 2014). Additionally, African American males were more likely than four-year collegians to select an institution based on the desire to live at home. Additional reasons included open admissions policies, the school's acceptance of college credit, and low tuition costs (Wood & Harrison, 2014). Several scholars explored the importance of investigating college enrollment decision-making factors (Crosta, 2014; Strayhorn, 2012; Wood, 2014).

However, additional research was needed on African American males' college choices. A small percentage of research indicated students who enrolled in community colleges completed an award within two years of study (Crosta, 2014). One primary reason was community college student pathways and enrollment patterns were nontraditional; students routinely switched into and out of full- and part-time statuses, and students frequently skipped terms (Crosta, 2014). In addition, the group of students tended to have fewer financial resources than Caucasian counterparts (Harper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2012).

Hence, community colleges served as a byproduct of serving older students who often tended to work and had family obligations (Wood, 2014). The researcher believed community colleges needed to help alleviate the crisis and to educate a mass, ill-equipped population of Africa American men. Considering the specific classification of writing survey, the researcher believed the overall affirmations and minimal exact proof needed further exploration regarding why African American men went to junior colleges and why the ingenuity and scholastic accomplishment was low.

The Prevalence of African American Males in Higher Education

The researcher observed the importance to study Black males' experiences in higher education because, historically, visibility had been hidden. A growing body of research is looking at various aspects and conditions of Black men enrolled in higher education. Various scholars are examining Black males who are academically prepared and successful in both predominately White institution and historically Black institution settings.

Other studies have focused on academically underprepared males, high achieving males, and factors that impact Black males' learning (Billie & Joelle, 2012). The challenges African American males endured stemmed from the societal treatment throughout the history of the United States. Black male students were judged on the burdens of low expectations from K-12 teachers, which followed students into college (Jay, 2018). Occasionally, individuals found themselves overwhelmed during the first year with the rigorous coursework and, to an extent, were bothered by feeling unprepared to meet the professors' expectations, based on such preconceived notions (Nelson et al., 2020). Moreover, when Black men gained access to the coveted world of higher

education and failed to perform at the same level as White counterparts, faculty often cited substandard academic preparation (Berhanu & Jackson, 2012). Unfortunately, very little research had involved Black males in defining achievement in higher education. Instead, the research narrative consistently told the story of what was “wrong” with Black men in higher education (Bates, 2017). Regardless of researchers' good intentions, only a handful of scholars had asked Black male collegians about individual perceptions as a model college student and perceptions of academic achievement.

As researchers perceived the intricacies of the issue progressively clear, educators, administrators, and policymakers alike wrestled with the topic of what needed to be done to increase African American male academic achievement. Understanding the increased experience compelled students to achieve academic and individual goals was significant, particularly for African American males whose college retention and completion rates were lower than other ethnicities and lower than female partners (NSC Research, 2017).

Completion of higher education was of particular value to African American men. Douglas (1894) addressed how the value of education is emancipation:

> But if man is without education, although with all his latent possibilities attaching to him, he is, but a pitiable object, a giant in body, but a pigmy in intellect, and, at best, but half a man. Without education, he lives within the narrow, dark, and grimy walls of ignorance. He is a poor prisoner without hope. (p. 11)

Through achievement, African American male students unlocked personal potential, improved career options and lifetime earnings, and were able to best contribute to families and communities (Robinson et al., 2019). Persistence in and completion of

higher education were critical for men of color. African American males' distressed status in higher education had harvested considerable attention at national conferences, in the media, and published research over the past 20 years. As researchers made the intricacies of the dilemma progressively clear, educators, administrators, and policymakers alike wrestled with the subject of what needed to be done to improve African American male student success (Bush et. al., 2020)

The enrollment crisis was only one of an apparent reiteration of higher education issues for the African American male student. Between 2000 and 2018, the percentage of African American males in higher education between the ages of 18 to 24 years old rose by nearly 10% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020, p. 126). However, despite the positive trend in enrollment, approximately 11.5% of African American males dropped out in the first year of college and by year three, 48.9% left community college without a degree or certificate (Hunt, 2019, p. 13). Although in comparison, research indicated community colleges helped facilitate access to four-year opportunities for Black students. However, a large contingent of Black men who began post-secondary education through community college did not persist to graduation or transfer to four-year institutions (Wood & Palmer, 2015).

The adverse enrollment trend catered to the higher education dilemma for African American males. However, despite the bleak picture, progressive young African American males overcame the challenges and successfully graduated with baccalaureate degrees in historically Black colleges and universities (Farmer & Hope, 2015, as cited in Mhlanga et al., 2017). The time had come to change the narrative and identify with African American males in higher education today.

A culture of valuing students was also inherently connected to cultivating a campus environment in which students practiced, including forming relationships critical to an individual's success and well-being (Felten & Lambert, 2020). A well-preserved and collaborative effort to empower the African American male was vital. College was practice for life and, like a music practice room, should be a space where students learned from mistakes, honed evolving skills, and took calculated risks to push the boundaries of the impossible (Felten & Lambert, 2020). The African American community dealt with numerous issues, and with numerous African American men not pursuing nor enrolling at colleges and universities, the capacity to transform life was restricted. While the challenges and deficiencies for African American males had become common discussion points for research and societal concerns, the fact remained many African American males did achieve success despite the many challenges experienced to overcome the academic environment in existence within the higher educational climate (Dickens, 2012).

African American Male Students in Two-Year Institutions

When exploring the existing literature on African American males in community colleges, the researcher noticed, there were two predisposed aspects of research findings: (1) research addressed how institutions historically aided in practices informed by deficit narratives about and perceptions of African American males, concentrating on the insufficiencies of the students, as opposed to the qualities African American male students bring to education; and (2) evaluations of institutional issues related to African American males' persistence and academic achievement.

While recruiting African American males to colleges and universities is critical, once students enrolled in higher education, colleges and universities must work to keep Black male students enrolled (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Many prospective students saw matriculation and subsequent graduation as a rite of passage to access the American creed of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (Lewis, 2012). Researchers documented the historical lack of persistence, academic achievement, and completion among African American male students remained a cause for concern. For many African American male students, the opportunity to attend college was an underlying advance in creating sustainable success. Throughout the literature, many African American males' relevance of post-secondary degrees depended on the concept that education was a weapon and prevented Black men from a cycle of disadvantages. Earning a two-year degree or certificate provided economic and social opportunities for African American male students. Hampton contended the following:

> The under-representation of African American men has severe repercussions for the men themselves and the nation. Whenever a group of individuals is not interacting and achieving optimum levels, the country is robbed of talents that could enrich the lives of many. (Hampton, 2002, p. 4)

Black male students had been among the most scrutinized students in society (Husband, 2012, Tatum, 2015). In educational settings, Black male students had been confronted with numerous misconceptions regarding academic abilities. Historically, the assumptions and attitudes toward Black male students appeared as not comparable with any other group in our society (Harper, 2012; Husband, 2012; Jaggers & Iverson, 2012; Smith et al., 2007; Tatum, 2015). Heightened by the belief’s others have about the

academic abilities of Black male students, the impeding decisions of Black males created more problems. The poor decisions and careless actions of Black males within society increased the negative preconceived notions educators had at every level about Black males (Jaggers & Iverson, 2012).

Theoretical Explanations for African American Male Lived Experiences

While the challenges and deficiencies for African American males have become common discussion points for research and societal concerns, the fact remains that many African American males do achieve success despite the many challenges they must overcome in the academic environment that exists in today's higher educational climate (Dickens, 2012). Several theories served as frameworks for aligning the data analysis in this study of the African American male college experience. Therefore, the assertion that a common framework cannot be assumed to be appropriate when studying a particular ethnicity or gender supports this study. Using a model created for the targeted population is preferable. In the following pages, five frameworks (phenomenology lens, self-determination theory lens, Prove-Them-Wrong Syndrome, Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model, and African American male theory lens) are considered possible for translating the data from the study.

The Phenomenology Lens

Phenomenology is part of constructivist/interpretivist paradigm that is both philology and methodology (Qutoshi, 2018). Phenomenological approaches are more effective in describing, rather than explaining subjective realities, the insights, beliefs, motivation and actions and folk wisdom (Husserl, 1977, as cited in Qutoshi, 2018) by clearly showing the research participants rather than hiding (Plummer 1983, Stanley & Wise 1993, as cited in Qutoshi, 2018). In support of phenomenology, the ultimate source

of all meaning and value is the lived experience of human beings (Armstrong, 2005). Phenomenologists endeavor to uncover meaning, and through focusing on participants' streams of consciousness – their thoughts, feelings, and memories – they seek to access their inner life worlds (Noon, 2018). The modern founder of phenomenology is the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), who sought to make philosophy "a rigorous science" by returning its attention "to the things themselves." He does not mean by this that philosophy should become empirical as if "facts" could be determined objectively and absolutely (Noon, 2018). Thus, the classical phenomenological research method with the Husserlian framework of descriptive research focuses on 'seeking realities, not pursuing truth' in the manifestation of phenomena as it is in the form of a lifeworld made of interconnected, lived experiences subjectively (Qutoshi, 2018).

Phenomenological research is based on a paradigm of personal insight and subjectivity, giving more importance to personal experience and interpretation (Pathak, 2017). According to phenomenology, the academic's task is to describe the structures of experience, in particular consciousness, imagination, relations with other persons, and the situatedness of the human subject in society and history (Neubauer et al., 2019). Phenomenological theories of literature regard work of art as mediators between the consciousnesses of the author and the reader or as attempts to disclose aspects of the being of humans and their worlds (Noon, 2018). According to (Wertz, 2005, as cited in Pathak, 2017): phenomenology is a low hovering, in-dwelling, meditative philosophy that glories in the concreteness of person world relations and accords lived experience, with all its indeterminacy and ambiguity, primacy over the known.

Self-Determination Theory Lens

Self-determination theory (SDT) is an experimentally based hypothesis of human motivation, development, and wellness. The theory centers around types, as opposed to amounts, of motivation, giving specific consideration to autonomous inspiration and control as indicators of performance, social, and well-being results. SDT also explores individuals' life goals or aspirations, showing distinctive relations of intrinsic versus extrinsic life goals to performance and mental health. Self-determination is an intrinsic, self-sustaining form of motivation influenced by internal stimuli. Individuals are guided exclusively by inner drives and seek to satisfy three primary needs to optimize their goal potentials: competence, autonomy, and psychological relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

African American male community college students have received notoriety, due to their disproportionate enrollment and completion rates. However, this population has been considerably deprived of measuring motivation levels (NSC Research, 2017). Although consequently, there is a limited study exploring African American male college students' educational aspirations, primarily in the community college setting, African American male students appear to have an unequaled perception and motivational outlook on their community college endeavors and end goals, unlike other community college classmates (Holland, 2016). Although this study focused on African American male community college students' perceptions of academic achievement, SDT conveys a parallel view of unfitting African American male students from a perpetuated condition of education, social, spiritual, financial, and a plethora of cultural deficiencies.

SDT proposes an effective structure for understanding the circumstances in which

students are likely to engage in self-controlled and purpose-driven actions motivated by an inner need to feel autonomous, competent, and related (Young, 2016). To summarize the three primary needs according to the self-determination theory:

- Autonomy refers to feeling one has a choice and is willingly endorsing one's behavior. The opposite experience is feeling compelled or controlled in one's behavior.
- Competence refers to the experience of mastery and being effective in one's activity.
- Relatedness refers to the need to feel connected and belong to others (Our Approach: Patient Care, n.d.).

The primary needs of self-determination influence motivation and affect task choices, effort, persistence, and achievement. When these needs are optimally supported, evidence suggests people are more autonomous in their behaviors, are more likely to persist in their behaviors, and feel better overall. The perception of progress is sustained by individuals' motivation and self-determination (Schunk & Dibenedetto, 2020). Developing self-determination in African American male students is a multifaceted conundrum, as researchers not only have to identify environments that are instrumental in the development of self-determination in Black males, but also, researchers must help African American male students capitalize on their strong points, in part by teaching African American male students' tactics to help them recognize and respond to challenges they will inevitably face. If implicit and explicit messages are sent that African American male students will not amount to much and lack determination, that perception will more likely be fulfilled (Muhammad et al., 2019).

Prove-Them-Wrong Syndrome Lens

Historically, education has been perceived as the great equalizer to establish a pathway to the middle class. However, the current higher education system perpetuates inequality. African American males are consistently overrepresented in poverty and underrepresented in higher education (Naylor et al., 2015). In 2003, Moore et al. introduced the Prove-Them-Wrong Syndrome, which was extended as an explanatory theoretical framework for understanding Black male persistence in STEM fields (particularly engineering). Previous research has shown that Black males demonstrated the “prove them wrong syndrome," doing their best in their majors to disprove the negative stereotypes about Black academic achievement (Smith et al., 2014). Stereotypes about Black men's intellectual inferiority, primarily from White faculty and students, permeate the institutional environment, triggering the syndrome.

A unifying affective disposition evident in Black men with the Prove-Them-Wrong Syndrome is that they have direct control over the outcomes of their academic futures. In other words, men with the syndrome illustrate a high internal locus of causality (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Primarily, African American men with the Prove-Them-Wrong Syndrome strive to prove naysayers wrong, especially those who doubt their belonging and abilities.

Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model

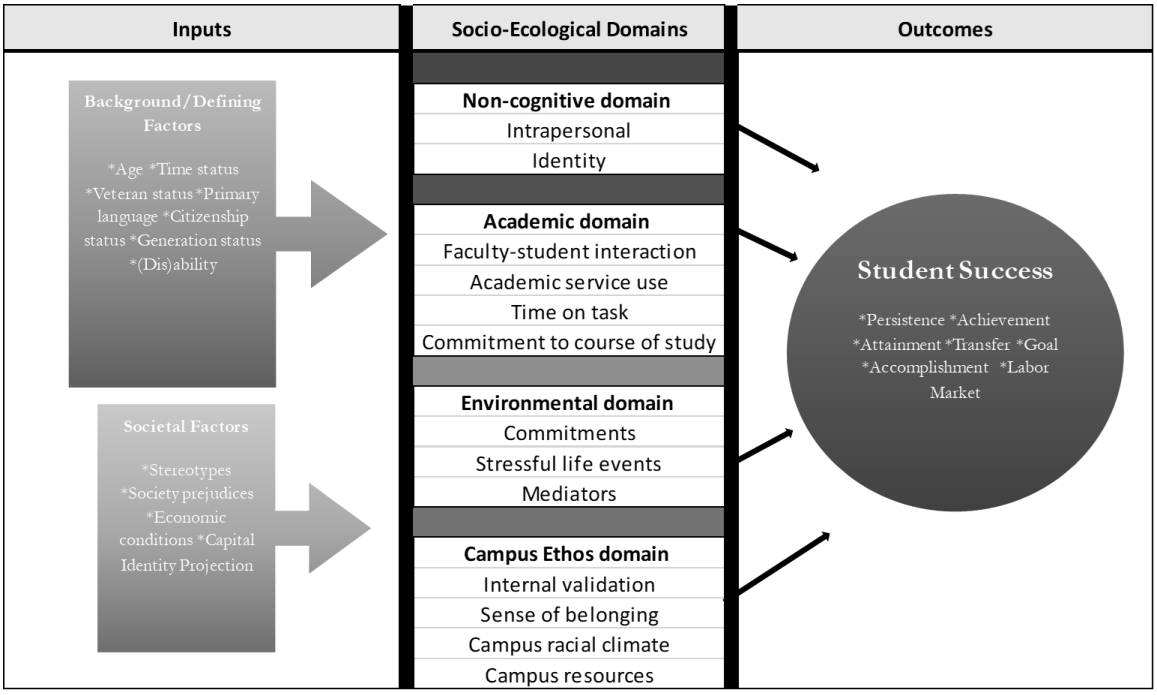
Persistence in higher education refers to “the decision to remain in or to withdraw from higher education” (Munro, 1981, as cited in Bates, 2017). Community colleges are vital providers of access and opportunity for an increasing percentage of multicultural, multigenerational, low-income, and first-generation college students (AACC, 2016;

McNair, Couturier, & Christian, 2015). While African American male students may perceive themselves as competent in achieving their desired academic goals, researchers have long recognized the socio-ecological gap between preparation and persistence needed to succeed academically. This gap often results in African American male students failing to meet the academic challenges of adjusting to college life.

Piggybacking from the scholarly thought in human ecology, Wood and Harris (2012) articulated the Socio-Ecological Outcomes (SEO) model. This model focuses on the nexus of social and ecological planes to portray factors that influence success outcomes (e.g., persistence, achievement, attainment, transfer) for men who have been historically underrepresented and underserved in education, particularly men of color (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Although there has been a heavy concentration of African American men in community colleges, theoretical and conceptual models that explain their development and success have been virtually absent from the published scholarship (Harris & Wood, 2016). The SEO model has the most explicit utility for community colleges, as the model was created and had initial validation work done on men of color (particularly Black and Latino men) in community colleges (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Palmer and Wood identified societal factors (see Figure 1) as a precursor to shaping pre-college experiences for African American men, including stereotypes about African American men, the prejudice they face in society, economic conditions, and capital identity projection (Wood & Palmer, 2015, p. 42).

Figure 1

Intercorrelations for Social and Ecological Factors that Portray College Success Outcomes



An inclusive approach, known as the Socio-Ecological Outcomes (SEO) model makes a clear depiction that African American male students' success can be conceptualized in terms of individual abilities to persevere and achieve academic success.

African American Male Theory Lens

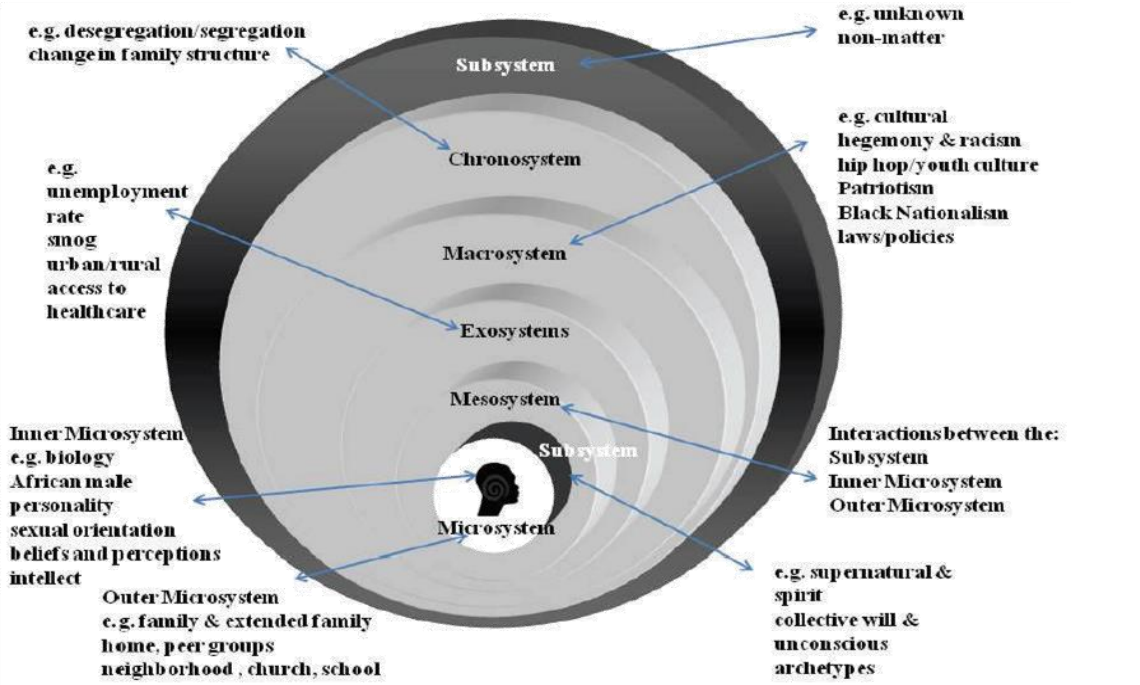
Researchers Lawson Bush and Edward C. Bush (2013) created the theoretical framework known as the African American Male Theory (AAMT). The AAMT is considered a theoretical framework to "articulate the position and trajectory of African American boys and men, which can be used to describe pre- and post-enslavement experiences and the spiritual, psychological, social, and educational development of African American boys (Bush & Bush, 2013). Bush and Bush (2013) highlighted

Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological systems theory and the African worldview as predominant informants of the ecological approach. Regarding the Bush's work, it is recognizable the lives of Black boys and men were shaped by the interconnectedness of systems (such as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem) in relation to Bronfenbrenner's work. The researchers also offered a new system, the sub-system, which, among other aspects, recognizes Black men's collective unconsciousness, spirituality, and the supernatural.

Based on the correlation of an ecological system approach, the researchers claimed the AAMT comprised six tenets tracing the trajectory of African American boys and men within unique societal experiences (Bush & Bush, 2013). The author of the model identified links between six interconnected internal and external systems (see Figure 2). The first tenet of AAMT acknowledged the individual and collective experiences, behaviors, outcomes, beliefs, perceptions, phenomena, and trajectories of African American boys and men. A crucial derivation from Bronfenbrenner was the division of the microsystem into two distinct categories. The inner microsystem included one's biology, personality, beliefs, and perceptions, and the outer microsystem, included one's home, family, and peers, specifying space for analyzing influence (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 8).

Figure 2

Ecological Systems Model for African American Male Theory



Note. African American male theory is a model that incorporates Bronfenbrenner's five ecological systems in conjunction with expanding the mesosystem and a sixth system added by AAMT called the subsystem. Source: "Introducing African American Male Theory," by L. V. Bush and E. C. Bush (2013), *Journal of African American Males in Education, 4*(1), p. 9. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix F).

The mesosystem, or second AAMT tenet, recognizes the microsystem's different connections where Black men's lives, experiences, and perceptions intertwined with the realities of being male and of African descent. The researchers suggested detailing these distinctions requires cross-disciplinary perspectives that can result in programming and practices that are distinct to Black men across numerous contexts (e.g., sexual orientation, personality, perceptions; Bush & Bush, 2013).

The third tenet, AAMT, is a continuity of African culture, consciousness, and biology that influences the experiences of African American boys and men. Finally, the

exosystems identified the external environmental settings and community factors, such as parental occupation or experiences before and after enslavement, that effect individuals not directly involved (Bush & Bush, 2013).

"African American boys and men are resilient and resistant" was the fourth AAMT tenet (Wood & Palmer, 2015, pp. 39-41). The researchers claimed the AAMT comprises six tenets focused on the physical, emotional, and ideological relevance of more influential cultures or systems on individual development. Political, economic, regional, and national cultures may be included. AAMT emphasized Black boys, men, and systems' rejection of White mainstream cultural hegemony and oppression and made a connection between resistance and resiliency (Bush & Bush, 2013).

The chronosystem, or fifth tenet, of AAMT extended that race and racism coupled with classism and sexism had profound results on the lives of Black men. This tenet considered the pattern and arrangement of environmental events and transitions and the sociohistorical context in which occurred over time, such as the development of Affirmative Action or Critical Race Theory (CRT; Bush & Bush, 2018). Key to the tenet was the prioritization of race and the intersection of race with class and gender above other forms of marginality (e.g., politics, education, disability, religion).

Last, the term sub-system referred to the sixth tenet the developers of AAMT added. The sub-system presented the space which considered the connection and contribution of such matters as the supernatural and spirit, the collective will, collective consciousness, and prototypes. Additionally, it exhibited the probability to consider what well-known, highly regarded physicists defined as multidimensional levels of reality

existing in parallel spaces on the individual male level in the microsystem and as an undercurrent of the other systems in the model (Bush & Bush, 2018).

The Role of Community College Professionals in Addressing Persistence and Achievement for African American Male Students

Community colleges are two-year institutions that offer training in various trades and help many students transition to four-year institutions. Community colleges, according to researchers, have given people who might not have been able to attend college the chance to do so in recent times (Thelin, 2019). However, on the other hand, today's community colleges are undergoing significant transformation. More specifically, this change is rapid and multifaceted and is a direct response to society's growing demand for skills and knowledge and ever-changing conditions (Lewis, 2012).

Certain factors affect African American students' persistence and academic achievement, specifically males. Scholars suggested many community college professionals were woefully underprepared to teach and support men of color. A student’s academic training often conflicted with the necessary traits of professionals who can educate the population (Harris et al., 2017). Although the researcher concentrated on the persistence and academic achievement of Black male students at a public community college in the Midwest, to include the responsibility community college professionals aided in addressing students' success and persistence.

Branch (2017) noted additional research was needed on how community college professionals can increase African American male community college students' persistence and academic achievement. Community College professionals directly influenced leading indicators, such as retention in courses, success in courses, and

persistence from one term to the next. Professionals at community colleges imposed prompt notification to the appropriate student support services or other types of assistance services in order to assist students in remaining enrolled (Piland & Piland, 2020). Community college professionals' role of meeting with students in a one on-one session was vital for building a rapport with the student and for the student to know the community college professional can assist. Surprisingly, many students entered community college alarmed with preconceived failure or clueless about navigating the processes of college (Lopez, 2016).

The academic achievement of African American male students at community colleges has been a centralized agenda for the entire institution. Generally, community college professionals view their role as presenters of information and become disassociated from having a direct role in student persistence (Piland & Piland, 2020). Black male student retention, academic achievement, engagement, and graduation rates were attributed to community college professionals. Consequently, accountability was shared to actualize every goal articulated in the institution's strategic document concerning black male student success (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012). Previously policymakers within institutions influenced decisions to increase persistence and address the gap in college completion among African American male students when individuals understood how student perceptions shaped decisions to persist and how specific actions influenced perceptions (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012).

Summary

Du Bois (1994) words composed in 1903:

> The [African American male] is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, --a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels this twoness -an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 3).

DuBois' words depicted the distinctive challenges faced by African American males as a two-fold battle of self-realization in the world of academia. Chapter Two was a review of literature relevant to the study. The review included history of community colleges and the relevance within higher education (Thelin, 2019), the demographic characteristics of African American male students (Lewis, 2012), and the persistence and academic achievement challenges faced by students (Bush & Bush, 2013). The challenges with navigating the community college environment were problematic for males and need clarification for educators, supporting staff, and administrators who wanted to assist African American males.

Based on the literature, community colleges served as the primary pathway into four-year institutions of higher education for male students of color. Although African American male students may qualify to enroll at four-year institutions, students selected to enroll at a community college, due to social-ecological challenges or a fundamental need for further knowledge about college options (Lewis, 2012) . While African

American males' enrollment and graduation rates in higher education lagged, the literature captured powerful frameworks for institutions to consider as a tool for persistence and academic achievement (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). The literature summary indicated when African American male students were determined and received supplemental support from community college professionals, the students who engaged with institutional professionals were more successful in learning.

What was also clear from the literature was regardless of the institution (two-year, four-year PWI, or four-year HBCU), African American male students shared the same persistence and academic achievement challenges. Black male students faced challenges, such as mental health struggles, achievement motivation, stereotype threat, and lack of academic preparedness compared to non-Black peers (Grant, 2019). However, very few researchers explored how African American male community college students' persistence and engagement was helped by educators and other stakeholders. According to Harper and Kuykendall (2012), Black male students faced a unique set of obstacles putting students at risk of becoming disengaged from the institutions. By looking at how current African American male community college students viewed persistence and academic achievement, the researcher aimed to fill the gaps in the literature. African American male community college students' perceptions of academic achievement and persistence at the institution were uncovered by the researcher using interview questions and a community college professionals’ anonymous survey.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The researcher examined the perceptions and experiences among African American males regarding persistence and academic achievement in a Midwest public community college. Using a phenomenology approach, the researcher explored what strategies African American male students used to ensure persistence and academic achievement. The first section of this chapter specifies an explanation and the relevance of the research methodology and design for the study. In section two, the researcher examines participant selection. In section three, the researcher explained the materials and instruments used in the research, as well as the metrics used to determine the validity and reliability of the chosen instrument. Section four of the research study outlines the data collection process, the methodological assumptions, and the limitations, while section five includes the data analysis methods for the research. Finally, section six notes the researcher's observations on the ethical declarations protecting the rights of people who participated in the research.

Problem and Purpose Overview

The researcher focused on determining what strategies African American male students used to become unfit for slavery within the context of persistence and academic achievement at a Midwest public community college. Following the African American Male Theory (AAMT), the conceptual framework included the interrelated structures, systems, and processes in a dynamic and multidimensional environment, specifically the development, experiences, outcomes, and trajectory of African American boys and men (Bush & Bush, 2013).

The African American Male Theory (AAMT), developed by Lawson Bush and Edward C. Bush (2013), served as a theoretical framework for the study. The AAMT is a multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary framework used to express the accounts of pre- and post-enslavement experiences, while theorizing African American boys' and men's spiritual, psychological, social, and educational development and experiences (Bush & Bush, 2013). The AAMT comprised six tenets, which summarized the lives of African American boys and men based on an ecological system model. Each system traced the trajectory of African American boys and men within unique societal experiences. Ecological systems were a natural and suitable framework for a comprehensive theory for African American boys and men (Bush & Bush, 2013).

According to various sources, community colleges provided a variety of postsecondary education choices, including job certifications, associate degrees, trade skills, persona, interest opportunities, and the objective of transferring to four-year institutions (Wendt, 2018). As an institution, committing to providing diverse personal and professional options by adopting research recommendations placed a greater focus on students described as vulnerable, such as African American male students. Researchers showed African American male students had the lowest enrollment, retention, and completion in postsecondary education in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

The researcher understood how facing the normality of student attrition at community college necessitated the development of an actionable agenda focused on the factors which limited student persistence and academic achievement. The research findings prepared institutions to significantly contribute to implementing a

comprehensive two-year or less college completion strategy to close the six-year completion gap for African American males enrolled in a two-year public institution of higher education (Shapiro et al., 2018).

Finally, due to the research, the researcher compiled a thorough narrative of the status and trajectory of African American male students enrolled in a Midwest public community college. The research findings contributed to a better understanding of African American male students' perceptions of individual experiences and the use of strategies that promoted student persistence and academic achievement. In addition, the results informed educators and individuals interested in achieving progressive outcomes in increasing student persistence, academic achievement, and graduation rates for African American males.

Research Questions

Community colleges had the most significant growth in student enrollment of all postsecondary institutions; however, African American male enrollment and graduation remained consistently average (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). The. qualitative study aimed to explore 11 African American male students' perceptions of persistence and achievement strategies in a Midwest public community college, not transferred from another institution. In addition, the researcher measured the perceptions of 25 community college professionals. Therefore, the researcher constructed and explored three research questions.

RQ1. What are the experiences of African American male students in a public Midwest community college?

RQ2. What are the perceptions and experiences of African American male students on persistence and academic achievement strategies in a community college setting?

RQ3. What are administrators, faculty, and staff perceptions on the persistence and academic achievement strategies of African American male students at a public Midwest community college?

Research Design

Practitioners often treated qualitative approaches to planning and evaluation in education for sustainable development from a single research paradigm (Makrakis & Makrakis, 2016). Within a qualitative design, a present social or human problem was explored in a distinctive setting through the examination of words and the detailed perspectives of the participants for the primary purpose of acquiring a clearer understanding of the issue (Creswell, 2013). The researcher utilized a qualitative research design in the study, due to the descriptive response needed to answer each research question. The qualitative approach explored issues and answered questions by searching out the 'what' and the ‘how’ of inquiry. Maxwell (2013) explored the use of purposeful sampling in a qualitative evidence synthesis by looking at people uniquely able to be informative due to an individual’s expertise in the area or were privileged witnesses to lived experiences (Maxwell, 2013). The persistence and academic achievement phenomenon were explored from the lived experiences and perspectives created by African American males who chose to attend a Midwest public community college. The study was based on the premise a phenomenological exploration was a division of qualitative research centered on the lived meaning of the experiences of the participants

being studied. Creswell (2013) noted phenomenology was not only a description but also an interpretive process of a single concept or idea, such as the educational idea of professional growth, the psychological concept of grief, or the health idea of a caring relationship in which the lived experiences were narrated by the researcher (Creswell, 2013).

The study's intent explored the participant's perspectives, perceptions, and lived experiences regarding persistence and academic achievement among African American males in community college. Therefore, qualitative research was vital to ensure the quality of the process, since the researcher conducted narrative data inquiries. From the participants' responses, the researcher applied qualitative research to qualify the participants' answers through interviews and surveys. Because the study sought to understand and identify the strategies African American male students who persisted and academically achieved in community college, a qualitative methodology was better than a quantitative method.

Population and Sample

The population for the study was 11 African American male students currently enrolled in credit courses in a Midwest public community college district. The Midwest public community college district was the largest higher educational institution in the region with more than 1.2 million students served; at least one person in more than one-half of the households in the area attended the College (Institutional Research, 2020, para. 1). As of 2019, the Midwest public community college system enrolled 17,294 fall start students; 30.6% of the students enrolled were Black or African American men, and 35.8% enrolled on a full-time basis (Institutional Research, 2020, p. 2). The Midwest

public community college system was instrumental in assisting research participants in exploring the perceptions and experiences of African American male students. Hence, the study assisted in how African American male student persistence and academic achievement rates can be compared with other state and national community colleges.

Snowball sampling was arguably the most widely employed method in qualitative research in various disciplines across the social sciences. The sampling technique occurred in hidden populations difficult for researchers to access (Anieting & Mosugu, 2017). The sample consisted of 11 African American male students currently enrolled at a Midwest public community college who had not transferred from another institution. A sample size of 11 students was chosen to ensure validity. As noted by Maxwell (2013), researchers argued validity was a property of inferences, rather than methods, and was never something that could be proved or taken for granted based on the methods used. Therefore, the validity provided reliability for the phenomenological research.

Instrumentation

An original criteria survey and individual interviews were the primary methods used to collect and generate data regarding the African American male perceptions at a public Midwest community college. The researcher designed the instruments to capture the real-life experiences and perceptions of the participants about the strategies utilized to facilitate the persistence and academic achievement of African American male students within the community college environment. The secondary instrument for collecting triangular data was an original free-form survey comprising 12 random open-ended and Likert scale questions distributed to community college professionals. Explorative studies conducted by various researchers recommended a researcher

directly connect with the participants and attentively listen to the participants' stories and experiences, which can cultivate a comfortable relationship with the participant (Maxwell, 2013). The researcher utilized a manual thematic analysis which is a six-stage process comprised of familiarizing yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and producing the report (Nowell, 2017). Therefore, as an instrument, the researcher decided what information was collected, translated, interpreted, analyzed, and utilized (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The researcher of the study attended a Midwest public community college which brought about knowledge of the culture, policies, procedures, academic climate, social culture, and institutional atmosphere. The researcher made no suppositions about the participants' viewpoints or perspectives concerning the researched institution. When conducting the interview questions, the researcher did not exhibit agreement or disagreement with the participants' perceptions or experiences nor interject any personal accounts that might alter the results.

The qualitative methods of in-depth interview questions were a fundamental instrument. The researcher collected data using virtual recorded interviews to capture precise verbiage, body language, and facial expressions. Most qualitative researchers studying human phenomena collected data through interviews with individuals or groups; the type of interview selection depended on the study's purpose and the resources available (Creswell, 2013). In-depth interviews allowed for naturalness, reflection, and responsiveness to individuals; however, conducting the interviews, transcribing the discourse, and coding/analyzing the text required considerable time and

effort. Data results were read, analyzed, transcribed, and coded (labeling and categorizing) to find similar and dissimilar information per each research question.

Next, the researcher increased the study findings' validity through triangulation and data collection from randomly selected community college professionals. Within qualitative research, triangulation involved "collecting information from a diverse range of individuals, reducing the risk of change associations and systematic biases" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 128). The data collected from the community college professionals comprised the results of 12 random open-ended and Likert scale survey questions, then analyzed and coded (labeling and categorizing) to find similar and dissimilar information per each research question. Triangulation of data was derived from the interviews and survey, which assisted frame working on a coherent justification for themes. The researcher found common themes in student and community college professionals' perceptions of strategies for persistence and academic achievement within a community college setting.

Data Collection

The use of phenomenological research requires a researcher to focus on people's experiences of a phenomenon to obtain comprehensive details that provide a basis for reflective structural analysis and ultimately reveal the essence of the experience (Bliss, 2016). Qualitative research was applied to evaluate the reasons and efforts to understand the perceptions and experiences of African American males regarding higher education and, specifically, strategies used to facilitate persistence and academic achievement at the community college level of education. Data were collected through individual Zoom video and audio-recorded in-depth interviews using 10 open-ended questions aligned to each research question (see Appendix E). As the research was structured in narrative

analysis, interviews were the primary data collection method. Prior to the interviews, a basic electronic Participant Criteria Survey (Appendix D) was utilized to help identify the focal group of research participants. From Participant Criteria Survey, participants were selected based on continued interest and qualifications for meeting research requirements. Once participants were selected, semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary source of data collection. Interviews were conducted virtually at a time and date convenient for students and completed within 30 to 60 minutes. The researcher interviewed participants over the age of 17 years old and currently enrolled at a Midwest public community college. The responses collected during the interview questions generated essential data aligned with the central research questions for the study.

The researcher provided an electronic informed welcome and consent letter to the participants in the study. The informed welcome and consent form gave an overview of the study. In addition, the welcome and consent form explained any known risks associated with participating in the study and gave assurance the information obtained from the study would remain confidential, and pseudonyms were assigned. The welcome and informed consent form was institutionally developed, which participants reviewed and then decided to commit to participating in the study. IRB permission was obtained from Lindenwood University to be used for conducting the in-depth interviews.

To prevent participants from electing not to participate, participants received $25 as electronically submitted cash, as an incentive upon completion of the interview. In addition, each participant was provided with detailed instructions before and after the in-depth interviews. Upon completing the in-depth interviews and survey, the video/audio recorded data were collected and downloaded onto the researcher’s personal computer,

requiring a password for entry which is only accessible and known to the researcher. The researcher's primary responsibility was to develop a less structured approach, requiring contextual understanding and looking for participants' involvement in the data collection.

Assumptions

The researcher made no presumptions about participants' opinions or perspectives regarding the studied institution. A logical attempt was made to guarantee professional objectivity and depiction of the research. When conducting the in-depth interview questions, the researcher did not exhibit partiality or impartiality with the participant's perceptions or experiences nor contribute any personal experiences that may have altered the data. Regarding the study participants, the researcher assumed the answers were real and honest in all responses. The researcher also assumed the possibility that participants, who were first-term students, would need to be more honest and open about the answers, because of the participant’s untrained experience in the college setting. Therefore, before starting each in-depth interview, the researcher explained the significance of the study and encouraged the participants to speak from unique moral absolutes to the interview questions. Finally, the researcher assured the participants the responses were confidential, and anonymity would be used to protect the participants’ identities.

Delimitations

Participants were selected by criteria established before the interviews and survey to ensure the representation of the larger population had been met. The participants in the study were 11 currently enrolled African American male students over 17 years of age. The participants of the qualitative, explorative study were interviewed to create a comparable representation of the larger population. Personal biweekly meetings with a

committee mentor were held to maintain existing knowledge, assumptions, and attitudes regarding the topic. The researcher also attempted to put the participants at ease and ensured each there were no right or wrong answers during the interview. Lastly, a delimitation of the study focused on participants who shared specific strategies to facilitate personal perceptions and academic achievement regarding the community college experience.

Data Analysis

The researcher completed 10 semi-structured, open-ended interviews with participants. Each interview provided insight into students' perceptions at a Midwest public community college, sharing lived experiences as asset-based research (Kellogg, 2021). To begin interpreting the data, the researcher utilized a thematic analysis approach. Transcriptions were reviewed multiple times throughout the process, and each interview was analyzed, transcribed, and coded (labeling and categorizing) to find similar and dissimilar information per each research question. The researcher discovered and identified intersections and connections, which were common themes in student perceptions of strategies on persistence and academic achievement within a community college setting. Results were detailed as an individual textural structure depicting the significance and essence of the experience, including the identification of the themes, anonymous excerpts from the interviews, and interpretation of the community college professionals' survey.

Ethical Considerations

The phase of ethical considerations for the investigation was professional in all actions regarding the interviewing process, research design, and data collection.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Lindenwood University was obtained before conducting research. Permission was granted to perform the research and collect data. The researcher presented an electronic informed welcome and consent letter to study participants, which provided detailed specifications of the study. The welcome and consent form explained any known risks associated with participating in the study and gave assurance that the information obtained from the research would remain confidential. The welcome and informed consent form was provided by the institution, which participants reviewed and decided to commit to participate in the study. Ethical considerations and measures were in place for protecting participation related to keeping participant identity data records confidential and secure.

The participants were made aware by way of an electronic consent form which explained the research and the time commitment involved with the study. A detailed explanation was digitally noted to the participants of the nature of the study and why participation was needed. Equally important, the researcher used impartial language to answer additional questions, concerns, or comments about the study. Therefore, the research participants were informed, involvement was strictly voluntary, and the participants could withdraw at any time during the research without any negative consequences. The research participants were reminded of the limits of confidentiality and were reassured individual names and any information linked to an individual's identity would not be shared. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym in place of a name to ensure the anonymity of responses throughout the analysis and data collection process.

Even though the researcher was a former community college student in the proposed researched collegiate institution, it was equally important to address researcher bias. Consequently, the researcher did not interview any participants who were related to or known by the researcher. The researcher informed the participants specific names would remain private and keep everyone's enrollment status at a Midwest public community college. The researcher had only access to the content of the surveys and in-depth interviews used for analysis. Because of the material utilized, personal video recordings and details of participants' responses were stored in a locked file in a secure place. Any additional typed notes were retained in the researcher's password-protected computer, with backup copies kept on an external hard drive. All materials collected were stored indefinitely after the study had passed, so all documents related to the research could be revisited for future research.

Summary

Chapter Three introduced the research design and methods and provided an overview of the qualitative method, narrative inquiry. The purpose of the research was to influence the lack of "progressive-based" literature on the access and success of African American males in community college. In addition, the study sought to engage future resolutions and reframe the deficit lens portrayed in existing research and instead highlight the qualities African American male students possess. In what follows, the perceptions of 11 African American men in the researcher's study explored the strategies used to facilitate persistence and academic achievement and how the institution supported or hindered an individual's pathways to success.

Previous research revealed academic problems which hindered the educational progress of Black males early on, impinging on the student's ability to complete high school (Wood & Palmer, 2015). As a result, African American males were at risk for a disproportion of adverse outcomes. Equally important, academic advancement further decreased the likelihood of meaningful employment and increased the probability of poverty and other social disadvantages (Bush & Bush, 2013).

In the United States, the educational pipeline to postsecondary education for Black males was, at best, a leaky faucet (Lewis, 2012). Although prior studies explored African American males' presence in postsecondary education (Matthews-Whetstone & Scott, 2015), the study attempted to address gaps in the literature and focus on the strategies African American males implemented for persistence and academic achievement in community college. African American males encountered some challenges on the educational path. According to Lewis (2012), prospective undergraduate students worked hard to prepare themselves for many years for the right to have access to a world-class education. For example, many prospective students viewed matriculation and subsequent graduation as a rite of passage to access the American creed of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (Lewis, 2012).

Notwithstanding, college enrollment of African American students increased 11.6% from the early 1990s through 1997 (Whetstone & Scott, 2015, p. 3). Despite the increase, fewer African American males stayed in college to graduation compared to female and ethnic counterparts (Whetstone & Scott, 2015). Therefore, if sustainable practices were not implemented to support the anomalous population of students/learners,

the education deficit for African American males would continue and may lead to a more significant reduction of African American men going to college and graduating.

Subsequently, African American males continued to face challenges about entering and graduating college. The disparity between African American males and counterparts was a cause to question why the group failed to persist, achieve academically, and leave higher education without attaining a certificate or associate degree or transferring to a four-year institution. Researchers, Billie and Joelle (2012) were aware of some challenges African American males faced in higher education; however, there were limited sustainable practices about how individual experiences influenced transferring to a four-year institution and certificate or degree completion.

The three research questions in the study served as guiding points for the virtual interview questions and a perceptions survey. The qualitative method used for phenomenological data analysis followed the less structured approach, as outlined by Maxwell (2013). The researcher was the principal investigator for data collection, compiling all surveys, conducting and transcribing each interview, and composing narratives from each interview. The perceptions provided by participants of the research may be transferred to any community college within the United States who serve African American male students leading to sustainable systematic change to the community college.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

This qualitative study aimed to explore African American male students' perceptions of persistence and achievement strategies in a Midwest public community college, not transferred from another institution. The researcher elected to use a qualitative study research design as an appropriate approach to achieving the researcher's goals. To begin interpreting the data, the researcher selected a thematic analysis approach. The researcher reviewed transcriptions multiple times throughout the process, with each interview being analyzed, transcribed, and coded (labeled and categorized) to find similar and dissimilar information per each research question. The researcher discovered and identified intersections and connections of common themes on student perceptions of strategies for persistence and academic achievement within a community college setting. Results were detailed as an individual textural structure depicting the significance and essence of the experience, including the identification of the themes, anonymous excerpts from the interviews, and interpretation of the qualitative data.

The participants in the study included 11 African American male students 18 years of age or older, enrolled in credit courses at a Midwest public community college. Additionally, the researcher measured the perceptions of 25 random institutional professionals at a Midwest public community college. Community college professionals were asked to participate via *Qualtrics*, a web-based tool capable of administering a survey that contained a description of the study, the researcher's contact information, a non-identifiable informed consent, and a link to voluntary participate in the electronic survey (see Appendix H). Approximately 100% of the targeted 25 community college professionals responded, with 84% of the respondents completing the entire survey.

Participation among students and professionals was voluntary and not identifiable. All participants and information utilized in the research remained anonymous by using pseudonyms to keep identities anonymous. The interview protocol also aligned with the research questions. Students in the study were assigned the following Unfit for Slavery (UFS) pseudonyms based on the interview order: UFS1, UFS2, UFS3, UFS4, UFS5, UFS6, UFS7, UFS8, UFS9, UFS10, and UFS11; and referred to with pseudonyms throughout the study. Higher educational professionals who completed the study's voluntary free-form perception survey were not assigned pseudonyms. The researcher intended to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the experiences of African American male students in a public Midwest community college?

RQ2. What are the perceptions and experiences of African American male students on persistence and academic achievement strategies in a community college setting?

RQ3. What are administrators, faculty, and staff perceptions of African American male students' persistence and academic achievement strategies at a public Midwest community college?

Results

The primary instruments for collecting and generating data for the study included the formulated in-depth interview questions and a free-form perception survey. The researcher video/audio recorded interviews for transcription purposes. Additionally, the community college professional’s perception survey was used in the research study to obtain the implicit and explicit details of institutional perceptions on strategies of

persistence and achievement of African American male students. Triangulation of data derived from the interviews and survey abetted in defining a logical rationalization for themes. Analyzing data from multiple sources was a strength of triangulation (Denzin, 1970). For the study, information from both the student and community college professional participants in the data collection process were triangulated. Since the process of data triangulation was an efficient method for comparing community college professional participant data with student participant data, the researcher analyzed data collected through two distinct collection processes.

RQ1. What are the experiences of African American male students in a public Midwest community college?

Socialization and Self-Unrealization

The researcher selected two interview questions to explore the reasoning and background surrounding the students' experiences as African American male students in a public Midwest community college. Results of RQ1 focused on the experiences of African American male students in a public Midwest community college. Based on the researcher's analysis for RQ1, three specific sub-themes emerged: (a) how the perception of others shaped self-perception, (b) defining current reality, and (c) striving to become a model student.

How the perception of others shaped self-perception. The parallel response to the first theme, UFS4 stated,

> We probably didn't learn like everything that we needed to with being low funded and I mean we had teachers, but sometimes teachers weren't going to be there, or they got you know, personal issues going on versus going to like a, say, a private

> school that costs money. Where I could get that education, but my family doesn't really have the funds to pay that consistently.

Additionally, UFS5 stated, 'from my perspective because I can't change preconceived judgments that they placed me and any time I had ever felt that was being implied by them onto me I would seek out either a black kid just work through that.' The responses from UFS4 and UFS5 illustrated how African American male students noticed the subtle acts of preconceived judgments because of race. To form further context of the first theme, UFS9 stated,

> Well, when I first came like the teachers aren't really like on top of like the black students and stuff, you know. Like it's when I came here like the teacher looked at me weird 'cause I have like tattoos and stuff and like they wasn't like helping me. I told him I was a basketball player so it's like the only way they will help you, like if they want to you know, or if you need it, that bad like so you know I am not trying to be ineligible. So, I'm going to a teacher to try to ask for help and these teachers aren't really, you know, like helping out. Like they just giving me certain things to do or advice. I want like advice that you give other people to pass these classes. You know what I mean like? I have to tell every teacher that I play basketball in order to help like you know, focus on me. You know I got used to it, but at the same time I still, you know, want to get the same attention as like the white kids are getting or like the teachers are getting from other people. You know what I mean.

The responses conveyed the student's reality competing with the perceptions of peers and faculty.

Defining current reality. The second theme reflected the students' accounts of not seeing many black counterparts within the institution. UFS 2 stated, 'I would say for me the only thing is like I've always lived in like predominantly white areas, so being mixed, there's less people that look like me, so it's just I sometimes feel out of place, I guess.' UFS7 similarly shared, 'you don't find many African American men, not seeing as many people like yourself in the classroom. There's motivation to show that all of us, can do something with an edge if we have the chance to get an education.' Our higher education system consistently contributed to the historically underrepresented population of students, primarily African American male students. Education equity, college preparedness, and access increased the chances of seeing more African American male students in higher education (Naylor et al., 2015).

Striving to become a model student. Perceptions of how African American male students perceived themselves in a Midwest public community college emerged from the last theme, striving to become a model student based on the characteristic of the "ideal" model student. UFS1 stated, 'a model student is someone who is focused and has drive; I'm still working on becoming a perfect model student, I guess.' UFS4 shared, 'someone who is probably dedicated to studying and being a leader. I feel like I'm getting there because I can't procrastinate. I also like applying myself more like we've been having study hall. I was kind of inconsistent.' USF5 stated, 'a model student is someone who has drive. I'm not the model student, but I have a drive to learn and be better because the more I put into wanting to learning, I'm retaining the knowledge that's being passed to me.' UFS6 shared, 'Oh, a model student is very, very prepared, very productive, and responsible. Yeah, my story, I probably see myself as

an average African American in college.' The paradoxes encountered by participants is a depiction of deficit thinking. Deficit thinking is a social construct attributed to the failures of marginalized groups to culture and value deficiencies (Williams, 2019).

RQ2. What are the perceptions and experiences of African American male students on persistence and academic achievement strategies in a community college setting?

An Inventory of Strategies to Promote Academic Achievement

Willingness to minimize social activities. Being at-risk or susceptible to failure may prevent minority students from achieving optimal success or achieving goals more easily accessed by non-minority peers (Young, 2016). Participants described a variety of strategies in relation to persistence and academic achievement. One defining strategy of the participants was a willingness to minimize social activities. UFS4 stated, 'Probably just cutting out on extra stuff. If it's not, making me better in basketball I cut out. Like cutting off, going to parties, or being out when I could be in my room getting my work done. You know that pushed me.' Additionally, some of the participants in the study described sports participation, stopped smoking marijuana, joining clubs/organizations, studying, and staying focused, as several other strategies which contributed to persistence and academic achievement. UFS7 stated, 'Uhm, def, staying focused is probably one of the hardest, 'cause stuff like partying, and you know put girls' on hold. So, you really gotta stay focused, and it's a mental thing. Keep socializing to a minimum.' UFS5 stated,

> I would say one strategy was probably wasn't even an action that went towards my education. It was an action for the better 'cause it was like right before I started my semester, I stopped smoking weed and I could have easily still

> maintained a good grade, but at the end of the day my work habit was not consistent. I am completely different now ‘cause like I can stay on top of stuff, and like remembering what I need to do and like what things need to be turned in when I need to. While I was smoking, it was kind of hard to maintain.

One way to achieve an inventory of strategies to promote academic achievement is to ask Black male students about perceptions on meaningful issues. When Black male students feel valued, accepted, and supported, students were likely to persist and obtain a degree (Bates, 2017).

Necessary qualities for students’ achievement and persistence. Numerous responses from five of the interview questions selected to explore more in-depth; focused on the perceptions and experiences of African American male students on persistence and academic achievement strategies in a community college setting. The world of African American male community college students incorporated accommodating qualities from a social community different from the necessary qualities for students’ achievement and persistence in a post-secondary environment. For example, UFS5 stated, ‘My drive to learn and communicate with people on what I'm learning and what we're learning as a whole. That's definitely one of like my biggest drives when it comes to having good discussions about topics relating to class.’ Two of the 11 participants described the value of a mother’s support influenced persistence and academic achievement. UFS3 stated, ‘Definitely my mother. She's pushing me and taking care of me 'cause I have sickle cell disease and haven't been able to act as a “normal kid”. I never participated in sports. So, my mother suggested I other groups

stuff.' UFS4 stated, 'I received the most support from my mother, and she always pushes me to make sure I get my education.'

UFS11 stated,

> For me, uh, a couple of things. I like education and so that's motivating for me. I also want to be productive and having credentials is something that I've always wanted to do. Another thing is that my father didn't complete college and my grandfather was a very intelligent man, did very well in high school and was awarded a college scholarship but it was a partial. So, in 1935 when he graduated from high school, he had two years covered. But did not know how to handle the other four and so he had no one to tell him about what resources were available and so he didn't go to college. He went to work instead. So, while he didn't lead a hard life, he could have led an easier life with a degree, in my opinion. You know, it's desperation or I use them as inspiration. I try to make him proud and I try to make my dad proud and as well as rest of my family so.

UFS10 detailed, 'I definitely stopped watching a lot of TV and studying and focusing more on the curriculum in my degree. Also, just try to make better schedules as well 'cause, I'm a scheduled type of person.'

Interpretations of African American Male Students' Institutional Perceptions

Minimal behavior towards African American male students. Participants were asked to define the support received from the institution. Based on responses, African American male students' perceptions of persistence and academic achievement held by administrators, faculty, and staff at a public Midwest community college indicated minimal behavior towards African American male students. UFS4 shared, 'The support I received from my advisor is like 50/50. I feel like black students don't get pushed as

much as the white students. The advisors like when I need help with something, they wouldn't really reach out.' USF9 stated, 'There are some teachers, I have will just sit in the class and not help nobody. The staff are like low grade honestly. They're just here for the money and will help kids they like or they think that's gonna pass.' Prior research suggested higher education institutions failed Black male collegians when the institution defined success, because the institutions placed the responsibility on the student to adapt to the dominant conception of success. Students who did not "fit" the dominant narrative of the HWI environment were thus, disadvantaged, and the institution typically did not invest in other ways the students' achieved success (Bates, 2017).

Engaging in Black male programming. Alternative perspectives determined by several participants stated engaging in Black male programming facilitated participants' levels of persistence and academic achievement. In contrast, some of the other participants' preconceived attitudes of persistence and academic achievement held by administrators, faculty, and staff at a public Midwest community college indicated specific community college professionals' behaviors towards African American male students was constructive.

USF3 stated,

> Support from a man who looked like me definitely helped push me up. I had a coding class that I was struggling in and to the point where I was like really staying up late at night to figure out what the assignment was. He definitely helped me out trying to navigate through the whole schooling system and how to pass my classes.

USF5 stated, 'I would say so far very good compared to what I was getting high school, 'cause there was a three-month difference between high school and my freshman year

in college. I was finally like getting actual support for things.' USF2 shared, 'Oh, I think like the support that they're providing us is like, oddly incredible. I think it's specifically 'cause I connect with men of color, but like they all are going the extra mile to make sure that we're successful.'

RQ3. The last research question for this study was directed at community college professionals and asked: What are administrators, faculty, and staff perceptions of African American male students' persistence and academic achievement strategies at a public Midwest community college?

Reflections of Community College Professional's Perceptions Regarding African American Male Students' Persistence and Academic Achievement

Professionals on campus developed initiatives to increase black male student success without fully comprehending how unavoidable the challenge was or in which areas institutional action was urgently needed. As such, empirical evidence pointed to the factors that stymied Black male student success and organized around three areas: (a) academic under-preparedness; (b) unwelcoming institutional climates that result in isolation and marginalization; and (c) unsupportive faculty and peer relationships that lead to disengagement (Beatty & McElderry, 2018). Survey responses from the Community college professionals supported the observed details of institutional perceptions on the persistence and achievement of African American male students. Based on the researcher's analysis for RQ3, the researcher determined the Community College professionals perceived African American male students: (a) were influenced by negative social-environmental barriers, (b) experienced historical academic

unpreparedness and underachievement, and (c) would benefit from positive institutional support.

Negative social-environmental barriers shape African American male students. Responses generated from questions 2, 4, and 7 of the anonymous survey indicated community college professionals believed Black male students were affected by negative social-environment barriers uncommon for other races and genders. Survey Question 2 required community college professionals to address the perceptions of stereotypes of African American males on campus. Ten of the 25 respondents mentioned, 'I don't know.' In contrast, the remaining responses correspond with the belief African American males were unintelligent, lazy, violent, and criminals (Taylor et al., 2019). One respondent stated, 'They were dangerous and must be watched.'

The conundrum with stereotypes was the limitations of stigmatization for specific groups. The stereotypes perpetuated against African American males often resulted in oppression, which correlated with poverty and a host of other adverse outcomes (Taylor et al., 2019). Throughout U.S. history, the stereotyping of African Americans, particularly males, had a negative implication on African American families and communities. The expected behaviors of African Americans were fueled by stereotypes maintained by the status quo (Taylor et al., 2019). Question 4 asked community college professionals if participants noticed evidence of particular challenges encountered by African American male students at the college which arose from a student's prior experience. Of the 25 community college respondents, 10 (40%) shared African American male students combatted the lack of financial resources and endure significant traumatic family conditions. Five out of the 25 community college professionals (20%) indicated African American male students lacked writing, studying, and research skills and did not ask for

assistance. In contrast, 4% noted African American male students lacked access to technology. The remaining eight community college professionals or 32%, had not noticed particular challenges. Lastly, one (4%) respondent failed to respond to the question. Question 7 asked community college professionals to describe academic barriers African American male students encountered. Twelve (48%) respondents indicated poor secondary education prior to attending college. One respondent stated,

> I think this is for all students. Going to unaccredited schools for K-12. Very poor basic education. I can't fix 13 years of poor education. We get a large draw from St Louis Public Schools. Some of the A students, barely get a C, or, have to repeat science classes multiple times. Many don't know how to use do or due, two, to , or too. That was taught in 2nd grade at my kid's school. I had a discussion with an AA male clinical student about his level of work. I told him he was not doing college level work. He said his use of the word "symmetrical" was college level. Instead of trying to do better, he went to my director. I kept copies of students clinical work. When I showed her, she agreed it was poor work. He failed two courses twice.

Twelve percent of respondents stated the lack of financial resources were a barrier. Two (8%) respondents indicated perceived evidence of systemic racial barriers. Five (20%) of the 25 respondents failed to respond. Four percent of the respondents stated institutional acceptance, while another four percent indicated the barriers are the same for everyone.

African American male students experienced historical academic unpreparedness and underachievement. In addition to the negative social barriers, community college professionals' responses to questions 1 and 3 generated another theme: African American male students have historical academic unpreparedness and

underachievement experiences. Survey question 1 required community college professionals to discuss the kind of expectations African American male students had of them and do the expectations seem any different from expectations for other groups of students; 48% of the respondents indicated specific expectations, such as ‘understanding, respectful, helpful, and responsive.’

One respondent particularly stated,

> I think my African American male students want to be treated with respect, be given clear instruction, and to be graded fairly. I believe that most of my students feel this way, and that my African American male students are not different. That said, I do believe that sometimes those students may feel or believe that I won't treat them that way, that I might belittle them or treat them with bias or prejudice. I hope that I surprise them and defy those negative expectations. I teach developmental students, and they all want/expect me to 'baby' them a little bit. They want me to write out all of the assignments on the board (like teachers did in HS) instead of making them responsible for checking the LMS for their assignments. This idea of being responsible for one's learning is a steep learning curve for many, if not most, of my students because I teach developmental classes. I feel that most of my students also assume that if I give them permission to turn work in later than the due date, that it won't incur the late penalty as stated in the syllabus. This expectation or desire to not lose points is also experienced across the board. I believe that my African American male students want me to be understanding, but don't necessarily expect it of me, which makes me sad. That sometimes translates into their not seeking meetings with me or other staff that could be of help to them.

Four respondents (16%) of the 48% indicated, ‘Yes, of course, these expectations are different than other groups of students.’

In comparison, 28% indicated, ‘Everyone wants to be treated the same,’ while the remaining 8% responded, ‘I don't know.’ Question 3 asked community college professionals to address how successful African American male students were at the college and what indicators confirmed the perception. Of the 25 community college professionals’ respondents, nine (36%) indicated African American male students were not successful at the Midwest public institution. One respondent stated, ‘see more African American male students enroll in developmental classes.’ Twenty-four percent of the respondents indicated African American male students were successful. While 20% of the respondents indicated African American male students were no more or less successful than any other students. The remaining 20% of respondents were unsure.

African American male students benefit from positive institutional support. Responses from questions 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 of the anonymous survey indicated community college professionals believed African American male students would benefit from positive institutional support. For question 5, asked community college professionals if administrators, faculty, and staff were taking initiative to support Black male students' progress and, if so, what had been the outcome of those initiatives. Of the 25, 15 (60%) community college professionals indicated there had been multiple initiatives to support the progress of African American male students, while seven professionals (28%) had no knowledge. The remaining three (12%) failed to respond.

Question 6 asked community college professionals if they were knowledgeable of specific steps to support the persistence of Black male students. Of the 25, 10 (40%) professionals were moderately knowledgeable, while eight (32%) were not at all knowledgeable. Of the remaining seven professionals, four (16%) were slightly knowledgeable, while the remaining three (12%) were somewhat knowledgeable.

Question 8 asked community college professionals how the college's current efforts supported Black male academic achievement and what indication supports the perception. Of the 25, more than half (56%) of the professionals did not know, while 28% of the community college professionals knew minimal. One respondent stated,

> I think the college wants to support Black male academic achievement and recognizes the impact Black male academic achievement will have on the students' live and the community/region. I think if the college just ran a pilot in summer 2021, that is a reactive approach to supporting Black male academic achievement. Research and literature tell us that historically black males have the lowest academic achievement rates. More ongoing, proactive, consistent programming needs to be in place. It should have already been in place. TRIO does amazing things, but it doesn't capture everyone.

The remaining 16% did not respond. Question 9 asked community college professionals to identify recommendations the community college could implement to promote the academic success of African American male students in high school, college, and beyond. A total of 22 of the 25 (88%) of the community college respondents indicated early intervention and/or crisis programming would best promote the academic success of African American male students. Most of the respondents indicated implementing outreach initiatives during the high school years as a component of promoting academic success for African American male students. The remaining 12% did not respond. For question 10, which asked community college professionals for an opinion regarding the attitudes of administrators, faculty, and staff toward African American males, six out of 25 of the community college professionals (24%) respondents indicated the attitudes of

administrators, faculty, and staff had been helpful. Five of the community college professionals, 20%, indicated the attitudes of administrators, faculty, and staff were motivating, while two professionals (8%) thought the attitudes of administrators, faculty, and staff were thoughtless. Another 8% of the professionals did not respond, and the remaining majority (40%) of the community college professionals were neutral in the responses.

Question 11 asked community college professionals to describe if the attitudes helped or hindered academic achievement efforts, 11 out of the 25 community college professionals (44%) indicated the attitudes of administrators, faculty, and staff helped academic achievement efforts. One respondent stated,

> The faculty and staff that I know promote students as individuals and their individual success in academics. They are glad of any student's success. In some ways I think separating these AA young men into an initiative group just reinforces the idea that they are helpless or incapable unless they are supported. I am not sure how to get around that.

Twelve community college professionals (48%) responded with uncertainty. One respondent particularly stated,

> I believe that we have faculty who have positive attitude and some with negative attitudes and the college is really working to change those attitudes. It is a slow process and currently it may be at a neutral balance. indicated those attitudes.

The remaining two professionals (8%) did not respond. Question 12 asked community college professionals if they have initiated an effort to provide academic support for African American male students and what the outcome was. Of the 25, 13 (52%)

community college professionals indicated their efforts to provide academic support for African American male students. One respondent stated,

> I am in academic support, so that's my daily job. One of the best parts of my job is that it provides the opportunity for us to follow and support students long-term, sometimes over semesters and years when we are really lucky. I can say we definitely have had the privilege of participating in some student success stories. Even one student I can think of who didn't return this semester, we think of him very fondly as a success story because he was struggling when he started to work with us, and he made it through. Not everyone makes it, but I feel like the vast majority of students we've worked with have managed to finish their courses with passing grades, even if those grades were in jeopardy earlier on in the semester. It tells me that sometimes all it takes is the knowledge that there are people on campus who care for you, who you can turn to with questions, who won't judge you and will help you try to figure out whatever you're trying to figure out. That's an example of a VERY low-cost intervention. Showing you care and just showing up for students, consistently, so they can learn to count on you to be there and keep your word to them doesn't require a lot of effort, especially when you think of the potential benefits that students could reap from having a support system.

Another respondent conveyed,

> Every semester I require all students to attend two conferences with me. I have also often asked students to "see me" to review an assignment, or I have emailed a student to ask them to meet with me (sometimes because of absences, sometimes because of missing assignments), or if they have more questions than I can answer

> during class, I refer them to my office hour, or if we both have time, I will sit with them in the hallway after class. I encourage students to come back to meet with me any time I'm in my office or to message me when I am not. I encourage them to go to the tutoring centers. Sometimes, I will physically walk them there; other times, I will sit with them at a computer and help them make an appointment, or I will call one of the centers and put the student on the phone to talk with someone. As with everything in life, sometimes this fosters persistence, and sometimes there is no response. I do believe that these actions, however, do at least broadcast my belief that students can do this - they can complete the course, they can achieve.

Seven community college professionals (28%) expressed no initiated efforts to provide academic support and persistence, while the remaining five community college professionals (20%) did not respond.

Summary

The qualitative case study aimed to explore African American males' perceptions and experiences regarding persistence and academic achievement in a Midwest public community college. Community colleges were essential in shaping a more equitable society through educational opportunities. The most productive community colleges—those that not only enrolled but graduated large numbers of students from historically excluded groups—have strived to transform internal structures and procedures fundamentally. Hence, the education and support students received aligned with student academic achievement goals and persistence. Much of the national dialogue and efforts to improve community college performance focused on critical elements of institutional

structural equity. The findings were evaluated based on data collected using three research questions. Many commonalities in the collected data helped categorize themes and correlate the information to previous research described within the literature review. Most of the participants in the study came from a low to average economic background and admittedly acknowledged the lack of academic preparation and how critical institution support was for academic success and persistence. Most of the participants in the study addressed the importance of avoiding distractions and remaining focused on studies as another critical aspect of persistence and academic success. Some researchers suggested intrapersonal factors, such as focus or effort related to student success (Williams & Coaxum, 2018). Participants also addressed the belief of proving others wrong about the stereotypes that plagued African American men and boys. In 2003, Moore et al. introduced the Prove-Them-Wrong syndrome, which aimed at proving naysayers wrong, especially those who doubt a student's abilities and belonging (Wood & Palmer, 2015). As a result, most of the participants in the study suggested minimizing socialization, spending additional time studying, and remaining focused because college is the pathway to desired aspirations of economic liberty. The research supported the assumption academics may not be the dominant factor among African American males to persist and achieve academically. In contrast, actual documented data may be African American males needed an inundation of post-secondary socialization preparedness. Henceforth, the researcher concluded community colleges may contribute to African American males' persistence and academic achievement to a greater degree than academic content.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of the research study was threefold, to explore how lived experiences of African American males at a Midwest public community college shaped the perceptions of persistence and academic achievement. Students' voices were captured throughout the study, and the perceptions revealed to describe the factors and strategies that shaped the desire to persist and achieve. The first percept explored the lived experiences held by African American male students at a Midwest public community college. The second percept centered on exploring the perceptions and academic achievement of African American male community college students attending a Midwest public community college. The final percept elicited information from a Midwest public community college professional on African American male students' persistence and academic achievement. The study added to the literature on the persistence and academic achievement of African American male students attending a Midwest public community college.

African American male students in higher education struggled to persist at comparable rates to the male ethnic peers. Martin (2017) from 1998 to 2017, researchers explored the lived experiences of African American male community college students to identify common challenges for persistence and academic achievement. Additionally, researchers compiled a list of non-cognitive issues such as age, socioeconomic status, school attendance, first-generation students, and marital status as factors influencing success in African American male community college students. While the data informed community colleges about demographic and non-cognitive barriers, the research further advanced the understanding of African American male students' strategies for intellectual

capacity and social impediments, which may discourage persistence and academic performance.

The findings evoked a concentrated analysis of the study's implications, resulting in the expansion of probable vital strategies to improve the persistence and academic achievement of African American male community college students. The value of the individual and shared experiences of the African American male students who participated in the study and the study's use of the students' voices became valuable for faculty, administrators, and policymakers. In the way institutions like community colleges prejudge and stereotype African American male community college students, the student's voice was frequently lost. Practitioners can use the study's qualitative findings to develop programs, services, and policies to increase African American male community college students' persistence and academic achievement.

Findings

The qualitative study aimed to explore African American male students' perceptions of persistence and achievement strategies in a Midwest public community college not transferred from another institution. The researcher elected to use a qualitative study research design as an appropriate approach to achieving the researcher's goals. To begin interpreting the data, the researcher selected a thematic analysis approach and reviewed transcriptions multiple times throughout the process, with each interview being analyzed, transcribed, and coded (labeled and categorized) to find similar and dissimilar information per each research question. The researcher discovered and identified intersections and connections of common themes on student perceptions of strategies for persistence and academic achievement within a community college setting.

Results were detailed as an individual textural structure depicting the significance and essence of the experience, including the identification of the themes, anonymous excerpts from the interviews, and interpretation of the qualitative data.

Additionally, the voice of community college professionals was missing from the literature about the experiences of African American male students at all levels of higher education. The qualitative, phenomenological study incorporated an anonymous questionnaire for community college professionals. The questionnaire ensured community college professionals could provide honest feedback, due to the topic's sensitive nature, which was essential to the African American male student's persistence and academic success. Attitudes and behaviors demonstrated by community college professionals enlightened the intuition in identifying areas of strength and weakness to ensure African American male students had equitable support and equal opportunities for success.

The findings of the study add to the research focused on African American male students in higher education, specifically at the community college level. African American male community college students remained near the bottom over the last 20 years, with low enrollment, low retention, low persistence, and low academic achievement, resulting in low graduation rates (Camardell et al., 2022). The study expanded the discussion to encourage engagement with community college professionals. African American male community college study participants generally had positive things to say about the community college experience. However, there were instances where student participants expressed preconceived judgments and community college professionals lacked a sense of engagement. Community college professionals needed to

be more understanding and surface. As a result of information provided by study participants, African American male students believed community college professionals who demonstrated more understanding would help make the learning experience easier for students to connect and foster healthy relationships on campus.

Table 1

The Findings Concluded: Fundamental Analysis of Participants and Professionals Perceptions

Experiences of African American male students	• Effect of negative stereotypes • Being Black does not mean being incompetent • Institutional support • Socialization in a predominantly White environment • Deficiencies of being a model student • Mental wellness and support
The perceptions and experiences of African American male students on persistence and academic achievement strategies	• Time management strategies • Minimizing unproductive social activities • Becoming an example for family • Take education more seriously • Removing debilitating habits • Connecting on campus and with people resources • The need for faculty support • Positive faculty interactions • Engaging in Black male initiatives
Perceptions of administrators, faculty, and staff regarding African American male students' persistence and academic achievement strategies	▪ Lack of economic capacity ▪ Academic fortitude ▪ Lack of pre-college preparation ▪ Ask for assistance • Faculty are the best persistence specialist • Academic intervention programming ▪ Becoming an ally ▪ Role of institution ▪ Sense of belonging

Conclusions

The five frameworks (phenomenology lens, self-determination theory lens, Prove-Them-Wrong- Syndrome, Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model, and African American male theory lens) were a solid foundation for the study. Each framework influenced the 11 African American male students' goal commitments to persistence and academic

achievement. A range of social, racial, and academic barriers existed in the form of pessimism. One would intuitively think self-determination or proving others wrong about the African American male students' existence on campus would poise as a commendable effort on the part of the student. However, African American male students needed to be more adequately integrated into academics and less stereotyped. Reverberating the literature review of the study, Black males demonstrated the "prove them wrong syndrome," doing their best in specific majors to disprove the negative stereotypes about Black academic achievement (Smith et al., 2014). Stereotypes about Black men's intellectual inferiority, primarily from White faculty and students, permeated the institutional environment, triggering the syndrome. While African American male students may perceive themselves as competent in achieving the desired academic goals, researchers recognized the socio-ecological gap between preparation and persistence needed to succeed academically (Wood & Palmer, 2015). The gap often resulted in African American male students failing to meet the academic challenges of adjusting to college life.

The academic perceptions of community college professionals on the participants served as evidence of the college's minimal engagement and efforts with African American male students, enabling students to persist and achieve academically. Of the 25, more than half (56%) of the professionals did not know the college's current efforts in supporting Black male academic achievement. Professionals working in community colleges needed to be aware of the available resources to direct students to the resources whenever the students needed additional support. Through outreach programs,

professionals running such programs also benefitted from raising awareness of the services among students.

The perceptions of the community college professionals portrayed the institution as having a limited duty of care for the 11 African American male students' academic aspirations and a commitment to persist towards degrees successfully. Perhaps the most surprising voice from the participants was the lack of self-worth and confidence in being a Black male in education. From the study, participants highlighted specific efficiencies concerning being a model student. Palmer and Wood (2015) identified environmental factors as a precursor to shaping pre-college experiences for African American men, including campus resources for stress-related matters, internal validity, racial climate, faculty-student interaction, and a sense of belonging. The 11 participants echoed the benefits of Black male support on campus through the statement about persistence and academic achievement. As someone said, “Support from a man who looked like me definitely helped pushed me up” (anonymous). Students were now determined to flourish and fulfill individual educational aspirations. Thus, community colleges made a difference in African American men's social and academic lives.

African American male students had come to a complete understanding of academic expectations and processes to persist to graduation. There is a culture of community college, both a general college culture and a specific college culture, that is developed at any campus. The students in this study attended a Midwest public community college with incomplete knowledge of college culture in general. Some

students encountered challenges as a result of deficient understanding of educational settings from high school days in the new educational environment. Subsequently, Black men attended high schools without adequate preparation for college; consequently, Black male students attended college without a clear understanding of the academic requirements.

The study provided reasons why the 11 participants persisted at a Midwest public community college. Some of those reasons included: interactions of community college professionals and other influential individuals, self-determination, campus resources information and accessibility, and high expectations from family and themselves. Higher education stakeholders needed to understand the ingredients for African American men to succeed in educational endeavors.

As the researcher revealed, the 11 African American male students were aware of how society viewed limited hopes for academic success. Some participants acknowledged the phenomenon. Perhaps an internal source of strength was the generalization from external expectations, which encouraged each student to persevere throughout the incredible academic journey. Specifically, the African American male students' goal was to "prove the world wrong." The experience of attending college showed the importance of community college access in the higher education landscape. A college degree was essential to identity, growth, and future aspirations for African American male students.

Implications for Practice

According to Farmer and Hope (2015), African American males still had lower rates of academic persistence and completion in higher education than men of other races.

Only a tiny percentage of the population made steady progress toward postsecondary goals. The researcher believed a clear explanation was needed for the lack of interest in African American male students' continuing education and earning a degree.

At the institutional level, findings and conclusions provided a few implications for practice. The 11 African American male students talked about how the public community college in the Midwest provided the chance to go to college. However, none of the 11 participants claimed to have done exceptionally well in high school. While some participants in the study understood the college culture independently, others refused to participate. As a result, the participants had a difficult time adjusting to postsecondary education. Throughout the transition to community college, the participants encountered obstacles and difficulties.

The study's findings indicated each student needed much help to overcome social and academic obstacles. As a result, community colleges' unique positions of admitting students who might not otherwise be admitted to four-year institutions demonstrated a mission to accept all students. The 11 male African American students developed strategies for persistence and academic achievement which suggested a sense of self-determination as a contributor to earning a degree. Although the implications observed how African American male students were perceived to be achieving educational goals; nonetheless, the recommendations remain complicated. Rarely were tales told or articulated well.

On the other hand, all 11 participants emphasized the importance of education. Positive portrayals of African American male students had the potential to dispel educational stereotypes throughout the educational system. Being viewed positively was

essential for African American male students to persist and achieve academically. The 11 participants understood the requirements for education and thus recognized the importance of persistence and a college degree.

Once more, the importance of staying focused was emphasized. According to the 11 participants, students' persistence, and academic achievement thrived by developing healthy social and time management strategies for college life. Professionals at community colleges used this practice to deliberately schedule programming for African American male students that focused on healthy social engagement and alternative study methods. Two-year institutions led in improving student satisfaction and institutional connectedness. On the other hand, African American male students should be held accountable for the college experience, performance, accomplishment, and integration into institutions.

African American male students understood the importance of successfully navigating life events to remain persistent. The resources made available on campus for all aspects of a student's life affected the socio-ecological and academic performance. The demand for mental health, loss of life, institutional or outsourced counselors to address sexual identity, cannabis health, and a myriad of other non-academic issues influenced persistence and achievement. Additionally, well-informed professionals employed at community colleges are directed to circulate available campus resources to students immediately. Programming increased student awareness of services, which has benefited the entire student body because of campus-wide initiatives.

The Midwest public community college required all first-time students to take college success classes, starting in 2014, and gave students a taste of college life. The

activities provided to students were to improve academic skills, knowledge, and study strategies as a community college student. According to What Works Clearinghouse (2016), first-year college students' credit accumulation, degree attainment (college), and general academic achievement (college) were found to be positively related to first-year experience courses. Students who benefited in a three-day college simulation experience, were better prepared for life on campus and introduced to ample campus support services. Students who had taken the success classes get the tools needed to solve problems, appeared to be more persistent, and thrived academically. For African American male students to continue their education, professionals at community colleges and students need to take the initiative.

Another implication for practice, was the importance to build relationships both on and off campus, as a critical component to the persistence of African American male students to graduation. In 2009, this Midwest public community college implemented the African American Male Initiative, a free, six-week immersion program focusing on college transition, culture, engagement, and acclimatization. Scholarships of up to $3000 were awarded to students. Additional instruction and academic support were also provided to students. In 2017, the program ended. Students and professionals at community colleges built stronger connections because of such initiatives. The participants' success was also found to be dependent on maintaining healthy relationships. The establishment of a campus mentoring program is another suggestion. In two additional studies of Black male community college students, mentoring was found to be an effectual retention strategy.

Therefore, a campus mentoring program should be established. Participants struggled with connecting with peers on campus. Many shared African American male initiatives made mentoring easier for students to get used to building healthy relationships with peers and community college professionals. The participants clearly agreed on the significance of having community college professionals who "look like me" take a vital duty of care for their college transition. By providing students with access to someone who successfully navigated college as a role model, a mentoring program would not only address the conclusion by allowing students to form relationships on campus, but also the first conclusion, which was African American men arrived at college without a complete understanding of the academic expectations and college processes.

Finally, to support persistence and academic achievement, the recommended practice is to implement goal setting and tracking to be institutionalized at this Midwest public community college. In their course on college success, students can set goals as an assignment. The primary academic advisor, primary mentor, program chair, organization leader, close peer, or other trusted advisor should all be informed of these objectives. Establishing a student academic board fosters perseverance and accountability for academic achievement. The primary advisors can reinforce these objectives during the quarterly advising sessions, direct students to inform or engage the academic board, and remind students to keep track of their progress toward goal completion. Self-determined individuals set goals and work to reach them, because they feel enough motivation to know that their effort will produce a finished product. People with high self-determination tend to take responsibility for their behaviors (Lopez-Garrido, 2021).

The researcher presumed the strategy would be successful at the Midwest public community college, particularly when participants moved on to a four-year institution, given that goal setting was a universal stance on academic persistence. Mentoring programs were all-around valuable. Even though students at all colleges experience similar life events, the kinds of support services that would be most useful may differ from college to college, based on the populations being served. For example, African American male students could be surveyed to determine the most beneficial support services.

The final recommendation for a specialized academy focused solely on African American male students' cultural and academic inclusion programming was made in the section. The academy's goal was to provide financial assistance to historically underserved and underrepresented Black male students pursuing academic, professional, and personal goals. The academy's programming was designed with all underserved and underrepresented students in mind, with an intentional focus on helping students who identify as born Black men. Black male students studying education, engineering, computer science, law enforcement and criminal justice, business management, marketing management, cannabis education programs, human services, or other specialized trades in technology, construction, electrical, and automotive would be accepted at the academy. The exclusive community would help students enter college, complete classes, overcome obstacles, build meaningful relationships, and move on to the next academic or professional journey. The academy builds community through special programming for academy students, opportunities for cultural enrichment, global corporate partnerships, study abroad opportunities, special speakers, professional

development, leadership, and adulting strategies. The culminating recommendation for content included in the Midwest public community college offerings could serve as a starting point for implementation at other community colleges across the nation.

Recommendations for Future Research

The qualitative phenomenological study investigated 11 African American male students attending a Midwest public community college. The researcher aimed to find out how participants perceived academic achievement and persistence. Moreover, the researcher needed to comprehend internal and external strategies by which African American male students applied in persistence and academic achievement. At the time of the study, few positive literary representations existed of African American men attending community colleges. As a result, researchers needed to expand the research on the specific group, particularly community college students. The environment at community colleges influenced a student's decision to stay in school or leave. According to the study, participants thought about how professionals from community colleges helped them succeed academically. Additionally, hearing the voices of African American male students, the participants received mutual respect from involvement in sports or the Black male initiatives on campus.

Community colleges admitted the most significant number of African American men, despite not all African American men attending college. Several opportunities existed for researchers to enhance and deepen the understanding from the findings of this study. Firstly, the study did not focus on African American male students' college preparedness or academic deficiencies. Most of those who participated in the study did not have any preparation for college and came from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

There are a lot of studies in the literature about African American men who either did not finish school or did not do well in school. As a result, the researcher suggests that future research concentrate primarily on college readiness and anti-academic deficiencies.

According to the findings of the study, the public community college system in the Midwest had the highest number of students enrolled in the state. The institution offered a wide range of educational, workforce preparation, and socioeconomic resources for African American males. The strong relationships between students and professionals' interactions across various community colleges must be the focus of further investigation. However, this phenomenological study could only recruit 11 male African American students in person at a large public community college in the Midwest. Considering the narrow study, the examination results cannot be generalized for all African American male students studying at various community colleges. As a result, various outcomes may result from a more comprehensive examination of students' and professionals' interactions across all community colleges and the institutional characteristics, such as size and type. These studies may reveal patterns of interactions between community college professionals and students that are either positive or negative. As a result, future research might uncover positive characteristics in the structure of community colleges that encourage African American male students to persist in achieving their educational goals.

It is commonly expressed, "college isn't for everyone;" alternatively, everyone is not for college. A college education is advantageous, because of the skills it imparts and the signal that a degree can send to employers. However, not all African American men are able to attend either community college or four-

year institutions, due to college exposure, unpreparedness, and academic deficiencies. The room for research regarding this population is very robust. Two-year colleges are areas of need for further research in understanding African American males' college experiences.

Because they are close to home, reasonably priced, and essentially accept walk-in students (open enrollment), an increasing number of African Americans enroll immediately after high school. Therefore, the development of similar themes will be determined by repeating this study in these settings with African American male students of a similar demographic. As a result, this study excluded other unanswered questions that warrant investigation and whether the findings could be generalized across all African American males: How have high school administrators prepared students for college readiness? How do community college leaders and staff orient students in the transition from high school to college? What are the barriers or generational barriers students inherited? Are various academic support and student support services on community college campuses accessible and equitable, and which has more influence on persistence and academic achievement? Are there class-related ideological differences in educational provisions for minorities? Does society or self-perception play a role in community college cultural disparity? If so, in what respects? How does self-efficacy link to the individual and institutional perceptions and actions on a community college campus?

This study expanded the knowledge of how African American male students' success was facilitated in community colleges. The results from the studies could yield

information to assist two-year and four-year colleges and universities in planning and developing environments conducive to African American male students' persistence and academic achievement.

The qualitative study sought to explore African American male students' perceptions of persistence and achievement strategies at a public community college in the Midwest. The 11 African American male community college students provided insight into the perceptions and strategies for academic success and persistence through interview and survey procedures. The combination of surveys and interviews provided in-depth information about strategies utilized to persist and academic achievement among this group of African American male students. Although the researcher set out to uncover how African American male community college students in a specific area perceived academic achievement and persistence, several factors were left out. In addition, insight into how other variables, such as first-generation college readiness programming, and the relationship to participants' persistence levels to engage in and excel in college still needs to be discovered.

African American male students who participated in the research expressed inadequacy regarding how other students and professionals at community colleges perceived the participants. The study showed that it was possible to find out how community college professionals perceived African American male students' academic abilities, how African American male students persevered until they graduated, and the similarities and differences between African American male students and other groups in terms of overcoming preconceived notions. In the future, researchers will be able to verify the validity of information more efficiently and efficiently by bringing together

professionals from community colleges and participants in a single study. The study demonstrated the potential for implementing support to create understanding regarding the needs of African American male students, as their experience shapes each group of participants.

The researcher's discussion of the findings identified the key factors and forces promoting persistence by synthesizing student experiences with the study's conceptual framework and the literature on student persistence models related to African American community college male students. African American male students' inability to remain in higher education, particularly in community colleges, remained a real and perplexing issue. Therefore, understanding the experiences and expanding the knowledge about African American male persistence in college was relevant throughout the literature (Wang et al., 2018). The examination of the perceptions of African American male students allowed individual voices to explain the decision to persist, this study aimed to contribute to this knowledge base about African American male students attending community college. Overall, this study's findings corroborate previous findings that African American male students' persistence is significantly influenced by non-cognitive factors (Wood & Palmer, 2015).

The literature review revealed family was related to African American male students' college experience and, surprisingly, more so by community college professionals. The students' accounts in the study demonstrated the significance of balancing work and school, interacting with community college professionals inside and outside the classroom, and engaging with peers through co-curricular activities and networking as a direct result of the influence. Even though this was a single study of a

single community college system, the intense stories, and experiences shared by the students illustrated the importance of academic support, combined with positive community college professionals' connections when students faced challenges and barriers.

Intentional engagement was established as a result of this study's inclusion of community college professionals in the discussion and recognized the necessity to address the institution's preconceived attitudes and behaviors. The opportunity for community college professionals to participate in persistence and academic achievement offered forums for gaining knowledge, related to supporting the holistic (mental, emotional, spiritual, and social) needs of African American male community college students, as many persisted toward graduation. Students were motivated by numerous matters, including experiences as a single parent home life, friends, and family, as well as achieve personal and professional aspirations to make a difference in life.

African American male student participants were not a homogenous group and had varied personal responsibilities. Diversity among the participants ranged from student-athletes to campus-wide student leaders, each participant to provide better opportunities for their future and families. African American male student participants accentuated the importance of needing to be viewed as equal individuals, receiving equitable help, and being equipped to make progress, while persisting toward college graduation.

Lastly, expanding the sample size of students in this study would have been beneficial. Male Hispanics, Mixed Race, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and other ethnic groups that identify as Men of Color (MOC) were not included in the study's

generalizability. Similarly, the sampling procedures prevented the researcher from generalizing the findings of this study: sampling based on non-probability. A critical weakness of this study was not comparing other racial/ethnic groups, such as Asian American and White males' perceptions of persistence and academic achievement. Based on the literature review and current statistics, these two groups have the highest degree attainment and graduation rates compared to African American and Latino males by gender. Measuring these groups' persistence factors pertaining to community college academic achievement could have provided more insight into the perceptions among each racial/ethnic group.

As previously mentioned, African American male students faced challenges to persistence and achieving academically at higher education institutions. These obstacles are addressed when attempting to increase marginalized populations' retention and graduation rates. The most common way community colleges observed student outcomes is based on students' weaknesses. This perception overlooks students' potential strengths and absolves the community college of wrongdoing or responsibility. This Midwest public community college system acknowledges the deficits in programming and the limitations of African American male students. There is programming to dismantle perceptions whereas deficits only exist in African American male students, while progressing toward increased equitable student success outcomes and graduation rates. To address disparities in persistence, academic achievement, and subsequent degree attainment, studies comparable to this research focused on a specific gender and racial group will, one day, no longer be required. Meanwhile, two-year, and four-year colleges' moral responsibility addressed the disparities so African American male college

graduates, who proportionally represent society, can benefit as productive members of society.

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Appendix A

LINDENWOOD

Research Information Sheet

You are being asked to participate in a survey conducted by LaVada Lewis at Lindenwood University. We are doing this study to explore the perceptions and academic achievement of African American male students who attend a public community college. The study will ask questions about the persistence and academic achievement of African American male students. It will take approximately 90 minutes to complete this interview.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time. There are no risks from participating in this project. We will not collect any information that may identify you. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. Participants will receive a $25 electronic gift upon full completion of the interview and survey.

We will not collect any data which may identify you.

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. We do not intend to include information that could identify you in any publication or presentation. Any information we collect will be stored by the researcher in a secure location. The only people who will be able to see your data are: members of the research team, qualified staff of Lindenwood University, representatives of state or federal agencies.

Who can I contact with questions?

WHO CAN I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS?

If you have concerns or complaints about this project, please use the following contact information:

LaVada Lewis:	ll799@lindenwood.edu	314-740-6202
Dr. Lynda Leavitt:	lleavitt@lindenwood.edu	636-949-4756

[redacted]

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or concerns about the project and wish to talk to someone outside the research team, you can contact Michael Leary (Director - Institutional Review Board) at 636-949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu.

Appendix B

$25 Participation Gift
VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR A RESEARCH STUDY ON AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS
Join Now!
The purpose study is to explore perceptions of persistence and academic achievement of African American male students at a Midwest public community college.
To participate in this research, you must:
Be currently enrolled
Be African American male
Be 18 years or older
Schedule a time commitment of 1.5 hours
In appreciation of your full participation, qualified participants will receive a $25 gift upon completion.
To find out more information about this study, please contact
Principal Investigator
LaVada Rice
Email: ll799@lindenwood.edu

Appendix C

Participant Online Criteria Survey

ALL RESPONSES WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL

1) How old are you?

   Under 18 18–19 20–21 22–24 25–29

2) Did you enroll in college immediately after graduating from high school?

   Yes No

3) Are you currently enrolled at any [redacted] campus?

   Yes No

4) Is this the first college you attended, or did you begin college elsewhere?

   Started here Started elsewhere

5) Have you earned your Associates degree within the last year?

   Yes No

6) What is your enrollment status?

   Full-time Less than full-time Not enrolled Completed degree

Appendix D

Interview Questions (Men of color focus group manual, 2014)
What is your name (pseudonyms will be used)?

1. In what ways, if any, do you think your race, ethnicity, or cultural background obstruct(ed) your persistence and academic success? **(RQ1)**

2. What barriers or challenges, if any, did you encounter concerning your academic, social, and personal environments regarding your persistence towards graduation? **(RQ2)**

3. If you experienced barriers and/or challenges what action(s) did you take to address barriers and/or challenges? **(RQ1)**

4. During your time in college, when did or have you perceived success as a college student? **(RQ2)**

5. What experiences, if any, contributed to your persistence as an African American male in the college environment? **(RQ2)**

6. Whom have you received the most and least academic support while participating in the college experience? **(RQ2)**

7. What expectations, if any, did you receive from your administrators, staff, and faculty? **(RQ3)**

8. What actions did you take, if any, regarding your own persistence and academic success? **(RQ2)**

9. What are the characteristics of a model college student? How do you perceive yourself in relation to the model student? **(RQ1)**

10. How would you define the support you received from the institution? **(RQ3)**

Appendix E

From: Bush, Lawson V <LBush2@exchange.calstatela.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, August 5, 2020 3:15 PM
To: Lewis, LaVada <LLewis1@lindenwood.edu>; bushe@crc.losrios.edu
Cc: 'lrlewis73@gmail.com' <lrlewis73@gmail.com>
Subject: RE: Permission for use of the African American Male Theory content

This email originated from outside of Lindenwood University. Do not click links, open attachments, or communicate with the sender unless you know the content is safe and from a reliable source.

Peace and Greetings Sis. LaVada Lewis,

Surely you have our permission, our blessings, and our help as well. We pray that you write from a divine space. I am going to attach a few other articles here that may be useful.

Power,
Ibv nana
Chair, Pan African Studies

From: Lewis, LaVada <LLewis1@lindenwood.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, August 5, 2020 12:54 PM
To: Bush, Lawson V <LBush2@exchange.calstatela.edu>; bushe@crc.losrios.edu
Cc: 'lrlewis73@gmail.com' <lrlewis73@gmail.com>
Subject: Permission for use of the African American Male Theory content

Midwest Public Community College under the direction of my dissertation committee chaired by Dr. Lynda Leavitt.

Hello Gentlemen,

I would like your permission to reproduce content, concepts, and other pertinent data from:

I am a doctoral student from Lindenwood University writing my dissertation tentatively titled Unfit for Slavery: A Phenomenological Exploration of African American Males attending a

Bush, L. & Bush, E. C. (2013, Spring). Introducing african american male theory (AAMT). *Journal of African American Males in Education, 4*(1), 6-17.

I am requesting nonexclusive rights in all languages. These rights will in no way restrict publication of your material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. If you do not control these rights in their entirety, please inform me of the proper agency to contact.

If these are acceptable terms and conditions, please indicate so by responding to this email as your confirmation of permission.

Sincerely,

LAVADA LEWIS – Doctoral Candidate
Site Director, Wentzville Learning Center, Enrollment Management
636.627.6622 (o) / 636.627.6621 (f) / llewis1@lindenwood.edu

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY
REAL EXPERIENCE.
REAL SUCCESS.
lindenwood.edu

Appendix F

LINDENWOOD

Survey Research Information Sheet

You are being asked to participate in a survey conducted by LaVada Lewis at Lindenwood University. We are doing this study to explore the perceptions and academic achievement of African American male students who attend a public community college. The study will ask questions about the persistence and academic achievement of African American male students. It will take about 30 minutes to complete this survey.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time by simply not completing the survey or closing the browser window.

There are no risks from participating in this project. We will not collect any information that may identify you. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. Participants will receive a $25 electronic gift upon full completion of the interview and survey.

WHO CAN I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS?

If you have concerns or complaints about this project, please use the following contact information:

LaVada Lewis:	ll799@lindenwood.edu	314-740-6202
Dr. Lynda Leavitt:	lleavitt@lindenwood.edu	636-949-4756
[redacted]	[redacted]	

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or concerns about the project and wish to talk to someone outside the research team, you can contact Michael Leary (Director - Institutional Review Board) at 636-949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu.

You can withdraw from this study at any time by simply closing the browser window. Please feel free to print a copy of this information sheet.

By clicking the next button below, I confirm that I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be required to do, and the risks involved. I understand that I can discontinue participation at any time by closing the survey browser. My consent also indicates that I am at least 18 years of age.

Appendix G

Community College Professionals
Students' Perceptions Survey (Men of color focus group manual, 2014)

Q1: What kind of expectations do you think African American male students have of you at this college? As an individual? Do these expectations of you seem any different from expectations for other groups of students?

Q2: What are the perceptions or stereotypes of African American males on campus?

Q3: From your perspective and in your role at the college, how successful would you say African American male students are at this college? How do you know? (What leads you to and/or confirms those perceptions?)

Q4: Do you see evidence of particular challenges encountered by African American male students at this college which arise from their prior experience? If so, what are they?

Q5: Are administrators, faculty, and staff at the college taking initiative to Black male students' progress at the college relative to other groups? If so, what has been the outcome of those initiatives?

Q6: At this time, are you knowledgeable of your institution taking specific steps to support the persistence of Black male students?

1 – not at all knowledgeable

2 – Slightly knowledgeable

3 – Somewhat knowledgeable

4 – Moderately knowledgeable

5 – Extremely knowledgeable

Q7: Describe academic barriers, if any, do you perceive African American male students encounter?

Q8: From your perspective, how effective are the college's current efforts in supporting Black male academic achievement? What indication supports your perception?

Q9: What could your community college do to promote the academic success of African American male students in high school, college, and beyond? If there has been no discussion beyond the college so far, what role should your college have in this discussion?

Q10: What are the attitudes of administrators, faculty, and staff toward African American males?

1 – Unmotivated

2 – Thoughtless

3 – Neutral

4 – Helpful

5 – Motivated

Q11: How do those attitudes help or hinder academic achievement efforts?

Q12: How have you initiated an effort to provide academic support and persistence for African American male students? How did your efforts work? What was the outcome?

Vitae

PROFESSIONAL OBJECTIVE

A proven, dynamic, and transformational servant leader, whose career and educational experiences are driven by purpose. I have a clear, logical mind with a practical approach to problem-solving and a drive to see things through to completion. To play a significant role in creating an institutional culture where all college professionals and students feel appreciated, so students know their time with the institution is a worthwhile investment in themselves, their families, and their future. Lastly, I have a genuine interest in adult learners and making the academy a space for life-long achievement.

EDUCATION

Doctorate of Education Present

Higher Education Administration, Lindenwood University

Masters of Arts May 2017
Nonprofit Administration, Lindenwood University

Bachelors of Science
Human Resource Management, Lindenwood University December 2013

CAREER SUMMATION

- 20-year career in the Administration with emphasis in Executive Level, Sales, Banking, Higher Education and Nonprofit
- Over ten (10) years of experience in administrative and managerial positions, including training, and organizing events on all levels as well as managing budgets and resources
- Skilled in critical thinking and analysis, mentoring, managing diverse people, analyzing contemporary culture, as well oral and written communications
- Proficient with instructional tools of classroom including but not limited to Power Point, SMART Boards, online tutoring, and learning management systems (Blackboard and Canvass)
- Proven ability to work collaboratively with diverse groups and establish ongoing relationships
- Capable of quickly understanding how systems are used in order to provide efficient support
- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills, and a demonstrated willingness to work in a team environment with diverse faculty, colleagues, researchers, and students
- Strong database and internet search skills
- Proficient in Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Access, CAMS, SLATE, Jenzamate, Workday, Salesforce, Google Scholar, Mozilla and Social Media Communications
- Excellent communication skills and a proven ability to juggle multiple high priority tasks

- Detail-oriented, with a reputation for thorough process documentation creation, review, and training
- Knowledgeable in records management life-cycle process including paper and digital born content
- Extensive knowledge of the design, implementation, and maintenance of records management and archival systems

Legacy Statement: "And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we're liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." –Marianne Williamson

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Harris Stowe University, St. Louis, MO
Spring Semester 2020
Position: Doctoral Intern Student
Job shadowing Vice President of Student Success; observing, investigating, and working with administrators, in order to experience a 'typical' day on the job.

Maryville University, St. Louis, MO
Fall Semester 2019
Position, Doctoral Intern Student
Designed an internal retention model, which predicts proneness to dropout among high-risk students. Developing a comprehensive exhibition for African American male students to promote persistence and success.

We Care St. Charles, St. Charles, MO
Spring Semester 2016
Position: Masters Intern Student
Assisted with developing and organizing a fundraising campaign for the organization's annual charity soiree.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Webster University 2022 - Present
Director – Metro St. Louis Extended Campuses

- Oversee and responsible for the operations and effective development of two extended campuses.
- Collaborate with VP of Business Development, Regional Recruiters/RCs, & Office of Corporate Partnerships on developing strategies to create and market effective enrollment & financial opportunities for the campus
- Manages an $800,000 combined budget and resource allocation for each campus.

- Identify and develop relationships with community organizations for recruitment or partnership opportunities
- Provides leadership for ensuring the campus provides a comprehensive array of student services, student development programs focused on student success, and enrollment management programs, including, but not limited to, admissions, advising, recruiting and retention, registration and records, student discipline, student activities, student advocacy, services for students with special needs, and other student support services and programs.
- Develop and implement recruitment and admission goals and strategies for the campus that ensure comprehensive and effective efforts.
- Promotes student retention by demonstrating an understanding of students' areas of interest, college community resources, scholarship opportunities, & difficult financial & personal issues surrounding students' lives.
- Coordinates and attends on and off-campus events such as information sessions, college/job fairs, group presentations, and more
- Drives university strategies at the campus level through coordination and collaboration with national and regional team members
- Ensures a high level of student engagement is communicated at all stages to improve retention efforts
- Assists efforts with business and industry, community agencies, community organizations, educational institutions, internal departments, and more to build Webster visibility and brand awareness
- Assures that all staff under direct reports have established and communicated accountabilities and performance expectations.
- Demonstrates positive, collaborative leadership and participates in collegial problem solving in a variety of situations and departments, emphasizing teamwork and beneficial effects on student learning.
- Assures that performance appraisals are conducted on time.
- Leads the unit in cooperation with the market area and region to maximize enrollments and control costs in support of university long- and short-term operational and strategic plans
- Supports and coordinates with centralized functions (Centralized Advising, Centralized Scheduling, Admissions Engagement Center, etc.) to maintain student service and enhance retention
- Interviews, hires, and orients new faculty and staff of university policy and process

Truman State University
2021 - 2022
STEP Office - Academic Advisor

- Develop and assist in the coordination of programming and events for students in our School of Science and Mathematics Division.
- Participate in Orientation activities with regards to Academic Advising related items and/or sessions.
- Advise students individually and/or in groups regarding Core and/or Major course requirements, course selection, academic policies and procedures, and academic resources.

- Track and intervene with students who have received multiple Academic Alerts to assist
- them in adopting strategies for academic success.
- Serve as the primary Academic Advisor for Missouri Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (MOLSAMP) students, as a secondary General Academic Advisor for McNair Scholars. These duties include maintaining and updating academic planners, coordinating, composing, and supplying documentation for external agencies, monitoring a student's academic progress, and providing guidance on academic related issues.
- Provide McNair Grant Writing Support
  - Coordinate timeline and workflow with Project Director
  - Participate in writing sessions to develop/revise drafts
  - Participate in McNair Orientation
- Carefully monitor at-risk students and develop and oversee a Student Action Plan for students placed on Academic Probation.
- Meet with students a minimum of two times per month and as necessary.
- Inform advisees of significant deadlines regarding Course Add, Course Drop, Mid-Terms,
  Course Withdrawals, and Academic Support Services.
- Receive and give referrals to and from faculty and other College administrators for students'
  major considerations, academic issues, or personal concerns.
- Maintain advising records and confidential student records in compliance with FERPA regulations.
- Engage in professional development activities by participating in conferences, training sessions, and webinars to stay current in the best practices of academic advising
- Participate in office staff development, workshops, programs, and administrative functions
  and meetings.
- Hire, train, and oversee student workers.
- Perform related duties as required or deemed necessary to meet the goals of the Office or
- Academic *Advisement within the Advisor's scope of responsibility.*

Lindenwood University
2019 – 2021
Campus Director – Wentzville Learning Center

- Provides leadership for ensuring the campus provides a comprehensive array of student services, student development programs focused on student success, and enrollment management programs, including, but not limited to, admissions, counseling, advising, career planning and placement, recruiting and retention, registration and records, student discipline, student activities, student advocacy, services for students with special needs, grants management, and other student support services and programs.
- Develop and implement recruitment and admission goals and strategies for the campus that ensure comprehensive and effective efforts.
- Manage operation of campus including the staffing process, recruiting, interviewing, hiring, onboarding, and professional development
- Develop training materials and performance management programs to help ensure employees understand their job responsibilities
- Recommends, develops, and implements student services policies, procedures and practices which foster and promote student learning and student success, and which support the educational programs of the University.

- Provide educational guidance and assistance for students by planning schedules, recommending courses, and determining appropriate education solutions for different types of students.
- Provides leadership and guidance for the recruitment and retention of students; actively recruits for the College and works to promote retention and student success.
- Provide and implement strategy for prospective student outreach and follow-up for feeder schools and community agencies; design and implement a tracking and evaluation system to evaluate the progress of students from their recruitment through enrollment.
- Develops, fosters, and promotes new opportunities for partnerships with public and private sector entities.
- Advise and assist with registration for undergraduate and/or graduate students each term.
- Coordinate schedule each term for all classes offered at campus.
- Supports College activities and special events through attendance and/or participation.
- Requires the kind of teamwork, supervision, and personal interaction, that cannot be had in a home office situation; therefore, regular, and predictable on-site attendance is a job requirement.

Outcomes

- Developed historical enrollment data process
- Increased enrollment for Fall 2020 term
- Exceeded enrollment goal for fall 2019 term
- Partnered with Corporate Recruiting to increase campus presence

Lindenwood University
Admissions Representative – St. Louis City Learning Center
2016 – 2019

- Interim Campus Director
- Recruits' prospective students within a strategic territory providing admission and enrollment information with the objective of meeting enrollment goals
- Utilizes excellent customer service skills to assist students through the admissions process
- Accurately and complete explain degree programs, academic degree plan, student services and financial consideration to students and their support system if it pertains
- Manage inquiries to achieve prompt contact and performance activity weekly goals; utilize approved recruitment polices/formats; make prompt and effective contact with inquiries and redirect unqualified candidates based upon incompatible career goals
- Secure new inquiries by directly asking contacts about referrals of others to contact that may be interested in the program offered
- Consistently conduct follow-up meetings with all applicants, daily, weekly, or as needed to ensure successful matriculation
- Encourage involvement in main campus activities as a means of integration and socialization
- Actively participant in team activities and initiatives
- Other duties as required or assigned

Outcomes

- Exceeded enrollment goals from fall 2016 – winter 2018 terms

- Established partnership with Focus St. Louis to host annual leadership conferences and workshops.
- Facilitated the updating and installation of student lab software on 30+ computer systems
- Designed a Microsoft Access database to track admissions and enrollment

A Better Covenant World Outreach Ministry
2013 - 2017
Executive Administrator

- Support the Lead Pastor in the accomplishment of the church's mission through ministry effectiveness evaluation, decision-making, planning and overall growth and development
- Lead the staff directors and their departments to an improved level of community impact
- Facilitate the annual strategic planning process to evaluate ministries, coach implementation teams and establish growth goals
- Develop and manage the annual budget and approval of expenditures of the designated the ministry.
- Encourage movement of people through our Leadership training and help to scale ministries to stay in front of ministry growth
- Primary recruiter of volunteers and leaders for ministries
- Help the Lead Pastor plan for future ministry expansion
- Teach to help establish this role as a key spiritual leadership voice
- Complete other duties as assigned by Lead Pastor and consistent with the mission and vision of the ministry
  Outcomes
- Managed operating budget of $10,000+
- Composed and packaged all legal documentation to obtain 501c3 status within nine months of establishment
- Successfully acquired over $3000 in donations for our first annual Family Empowerment Summit
- Secured over $10,000 in personal care items for distribution throughout the community

First Bank
2012 – 2016
Consumer Lending Processor II

- Administer variable rate change processes for consumer and credit card loan products involving system and disclosure changes
- Present key updates and information to Consumer Lending leadership and various credit union committees as appropriate/needed
- Originates and closes consumer loans following underwriting decisions and established standards and procedures
- Recommends and approves loans based on underwriting guidelines, set personal lending limits and underwriting criteria
- Evaluate loan requests and render credit decisions within credit policies, procedures and Fair Lending guidelines while exercising good analytical judgment

- Communicate adverse decisions to clients while maintaining strong business rapport
- Manage workflows in a fast paced environment to enable excellent service levels, responsiveness and accessibility for direct and indirect customers/members
- Design and managed client database tracking
- Maintain 60+ client pipeline

Western Extralite Company
2008 - 2012
Office Sales Support Administrator

- Executive Assistant to the Vice President
- Work directly with clients - specifiers, electrical distributors, builder distributors, national account distributors and lighting showrooms
- Analyze, negotiate, and prepare order agreements, subcontracts, and cost control budgets
- Manage project budget of $500M+ and ensure company obtains the best possible pricing
- Working in collaboration with the outside sales teams
- Providing product information, lighting layouts, quotes, project management and customer service
- Construct and manage online customer ordering website
- Manage replacement work orders for major retail chains
- Update division pricing matrixes
- Design and manage database
- Manage division website

ACADEMIC OVERVIEW

- Q2 Excellence Service Training
- Implicit Bias Training
- Leading Organizations Certificate
- Creating Conditions for Others to Thrive Certificate
- Core Strategies for Teaching in Higher Ed Certificate
- Transitioning from Manager to Leader Workshop
- Conference Presenter – “From Handshake to Handshake: Including the Non-Traditional African American Students in Higher Education Success”
- Title IX Training
- DEI Taskforce Member
- Anti-Racist Workshop Developer and Facilitator
- Anti-racism Pedagogy: Discovery & Deployment (Faculty only) Developer and Facilitator
- MKN McNair Heartland Research Conference Moderator

PROFESSIONAL AFFLIATIONS

Missouri Association of Blacks in Higher Education, 2020-Present
President-Elect

Missouri Department of Higher Education – Adult Learner Network, 2022 – Present

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
Future Member

American Association of State Colleges and Universities
Future Member