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## African-American Males, Part-Time Work, and Persistence

Ami M. Tripp

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Ami M. Tripp

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African-American Males, Part-time Work, and Persistence  
Concordia University–Portland

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Concordia University–Portland  
College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor in Education in  
Transformational Leadership

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Concordia University–Portland

2017

## **Abstract**

The central research question for this study asked how do African-American males perceive working part-time, while enrolled full-time, to have an impact on their persistence? A secondary question asked, what factors influenced African-American male students to persist through graduation? The participants comprised of 35 African-American male college students who graduated Spring 2016. This study was focused on part-time employment and its support of persistence for African-American men. Hence, persistence theory was the most pertinent lens through which to view the literature and the data collected in this study. This study employed a case study research, as it is an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon set within its real-world context. The case study method allows for better comprehension of the context of the phenomenon being studied. In analysis of the data, four themes that contributed to persistence began to emerge. The themes are job satisfaction, relationships with parents, support systems, and a sense of motivation. These four themes represent the thoughts and perceptions of the graduated participants as they responded to the interview questions and produced the findings for this research study. The discoveries holistically indicated that persistence included more than one factor. The findings from this study suggest faculty, administrators, and staff can support persistence among African-American men at predominantly White institutions. Also, an institutional practice or formal program should be established using faculty and staff to frequently engage with African-American men in formal or informal academic and social programs or through other campus activities.

*Keywords:* African-American males, attrition, college student, higher education, high impact practice, part-time employment, persistence, retention

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this to Curt, whose love has made all the difference in the last 10 years. Thank you for being steady and strong and good and kind. Hold my hand and walk with me through the coming seasons...the growing up and getting older. All of it is possible with you by my side. Together we'll watch our children take wing. The ride is breathtakingly wondrous. I pray it lasts far into our twilight years. To my children, Vinh, Jaden, and Angelina, who has been patient with me on this journey. Thank you for allowing me the time to fulfill my dream. Your love and patience is much appreciated. My love for you all can never be quantified. To my Mom, who has shared in my joys and sorrows, my trials, failures, and achievements. And whose love, courage, and devotion has been the strength of my striving. To my friends, thank you for believing in me. You've seen me cry and laugh so hard that I snort. Most importantly, you've seen it all and you still accept me for who I am. Thank you for all the wonderful years of friendship. I have enjoyed every single one. From every awkward picture to midnight conversations, you've always been by my side. No matter where life takes us, you will always remind me of my greatest moments as well as my most embarrassing ones.

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to thank God because without Him I could not have completed this task. I am grateful for all of the members of my dissertation committee. I especially thank my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Jillian Skelton, for mentoring and encouraging me. You helped me stay focused, and have tremendously shaped my development in more ways than you know. This dissertation product is evident of the gentle counsel you gave me early on.

To the participants who graciously agreed to participate in this research, there would be no study without you. The experiences you shared help confirm that there are many African-American males doing well in college. Your voices helped me learn what it takes to persist and be successful in higher education.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Introduction to the Problem

College student persistence has long been an area of importance in higher education. As researchers have scrutinized the theories and practice of persistence, many have considered the simplicity of retaining students in higher education (Bean, 2005; Braxton & Hirschy, 2005; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Tinto, 1975, 1986, 1993). Research on student persistence in college began being published in the twentieth century with studies on the problems and causes of students withdrawing from higher education. Higher education literature conceptualized the term *dropout* as “any student who was previously enrolled at the college, but not enrolled at the time of the study” (Pantages & Creedon, 1978, p. 51). From the investigation of the research from 1950 to 1975, Pantages and Creedon (1978) found that for every 10 students who entered college in the United States, only four would persist to graduation in four years; and only two more students would ultimately graduate from a college. In the current era of institutional accountability, retaining college students and cultivating their persistence has materialized as essential for all of higher education (Flowers, 2004). Regardless of this focus, colleges and universities have struggled to retain a large portion of their student population until graduation. According to Tizon (2016), only one in five students complete the requirements for their baccalaureate degree at a different institution than where they started. In 2016, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 60% of first-time, full-time students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year institution in the fall of 2008 completed the degree at that institution by 2014 (NCES, 2016). The stated numbers were consistent with Museus and Quaye's (2009) assertion that more than half of all students who entered higher education institutions leave their schools before graduation. While this estimate was valuable for

understanding the scope of degree attainment for undergraduate students, it did not portray the routes that persisting students took to earn a college degree.

The literature is filled with evidence about undergraduate student persistence. Persistence is a longitudinal process demonstrating the different directions that students took to receive a bachelor's degree (Alan & Smith, 2008; Astin, 1975; Braxton, 2014; Drake & Jordan, 2015; Gordon & Habley, 2000; Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2005; Tinto, 1975, 1986, 1993, 2006). These directions were best understood when scrutinizing them through the lens of student persistence, which supports a student's desire to remain enrolled in college until graduation. In addition, persistence, from the perception of the student, was determined by cognitive psychological attributes such as confidence, motivation, and self-efficacy (Graham, Byars-Winston, Hunter, & Handelsman, 2013).

Although this definition appeared simplistic, assessing persistence was complex and hinged on both the unpredictability of student enrollment patterns and the environment of the institution. Less understood was how unpredictable enrollment patterns added to the difficulty of determining persistence. For many reasons, students register at an institution for a given length of time, and then either drop out prior to graduation or transfer to another institution. While this dichotomous product seemed to be a straightforward measure of persistence, it was fairly complex due to the disparity in student enrollment trends (Hagedorn, 2005).

Although higher education was an essential component to exploring student persistence, it also complicated understanding how persistence was to be measured. This was because of the lack of research studies that thoroughly examined how colleges and universities impact students' journeys toward a college degree. Over time, research studies had scrutinized the issues of student persistence within an assortment of institutional settings. In many ways, these

frameworks had permitted scholars to contextualize findings and account for the different ways to study student persistence.

Persistence can be looked at in the frame of part-time student employment since research has revealed that the number of college students who work while attending college has increased significantly (Beerkins, Magi, & Lill, 2011; Perna, 2010). College students have combined work and schooling since the earliest colleges were established in the United States (Lucas, 1997). In fact, two-thirds of undergraduates at 4-year institutions were employed as were about four fifths of community college students. Based on 1980–84 data, Carroll and Chan-Kopka (1988) discovered that one in twelve full-time college students were employed more than full time while attending college, and that one in four worked less than 20 hours per week. By 2003–04, about 80% of American undergraduates worked while attending college (King, 2006). This represented an 8% increase over the preceding decade when 72% worked (Cuccaro-Alamin & Choy, 1998). King's (2006) study also showed that working students spent almost 30 hours per week working while enrolled, about one-quarter of full-time students worked full time, and one-third of working students described themselves as employees who also were taking classes. This data was evident of the growth in student employment and the subsequent rise in working hours by students on American campuses (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2016). In addition, low-income college students lack understanding of financial aid guidelines and are bewildered by the financial aid system, seeing added work hours to pay for school as a more realistic option (Ziskin, Fischer, Torres, Pellicciotti, & Player-Sanders, 2014).

Student employment is not a recent occurrence, but the numbers of employed students and hours worked have risen sharply, particularly in American colleges and universities (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2016). Studies have shown that working while enrolled is possibly the most

common major activity among America's diverse undergraduate population, and has a positive impact on academic performance and persistence (Pike et al., 2008; McCormick et al., 2010; Riggert et al., 2006; Robotham, 2012; Warren, 2002). Thus, working has become commonplace to consider working while attending college. Callender (2008, p. 359) established that "student employment is likely to remain part of the higher education landscape," as more students become increasingly dependent on their wages. Furthermore, working on campus has been cited in literature as keeping students connected to the campus in ways that enrich student engagement (Derous & Ryan, 2008; Flowers, 2010)

Explanations for the rise in student employment include earning money for essentials or related expenses (Callender, 2008), alleviating the financial burden of parents (Hall, 2010), obtaining work experience or practical skills (Wang, Kong, Shan, & Vong, 2010), supporting a particular lifestyle or as a reaction to peer influence (Oi I & Morrison, 2005), and socializing and meeting people (Curtis, 2007).

If the majority of college students are working, knowing the impact of part-time jobs on satisfaction and persistence is vital for stakeholders such as students, parents, academic advisors, counselors, faculty, and administrative staff. For example, students want to know the degree to which work affects their college experience and persistence and how many hours to work without impacting their academics and persistence. The answers may ultimately affect retention and graduation rates, which are important concerns to advisors and administrators (Callender, 2008; Hall, 2010; Tessema, Ready, & Malone, 2012).

Additionally, Flowers (2004) communicated the need to address low retention and graduation rates amongst African-American students. Across all institutions, the graduation rates for African-American students are lower than the rates for Caucasian students. In 2013, the



6-year college graduation rate for African-Americans was 40.3% compared to 60.7% of Caucasian students (Digest of Education Statistics, 2013). The combination of low graduation rates and part-time employment among African-American males is not fully understood and merits further study.

### **Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

There has been considerable dialogue on the status and circumstances of African-American male students in higher education. Much of the conversation centered on enrollment and graduation discrepancies between these men and their ethnic and gender counterparts. Data from US Department of Education showed that African-American men comprised 33.1% of the total college student population in the United States. In contrast, Caucasian men made up approximately 62% of the total college student population (The Condition of Education, 2011).

The college enrollment gap is greater for African-American men than for African-American women. Harper (2006) indicated that African-American men represented only 35.8% of the total African-American student enrollment, which is disproportionate when compared to African-American females. Even with these inconsistencies, the higher education community was encouraged by the fact that 70.9% of graduating African-American high school seniors had enrolled in college by October 2014 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016).

While African-American male enrollment was increasing, educational data showed a downward trend in their college graduation rates (Guiffrida, 2003; The Condition of Education, 2009). Kimbrough and Harper (2006) stated that 33.8% of enrolled African-American men earned bachelor's degrees in 2000. More troubling was that these graduates lagged in degree completion behind their gender and ethnic colleagues. In 2005, nearly 42% of African-American men graduated from college within six years. In contrast, 46.2% of African-American women

and 62.3% of Caucasian men graduated from college during the same time (The Condition of Education, 2011).

Regardless of these figures, research data proposed that colleges and universities are working to increase persistence and graduation outcomes for African-American men (DeSousa, 2001). This was obvious from recent years, given that African-American men had improved their graduation rate to 42% (The condition of education, 2016). This increase indicated that a larger number of African-American men knew what it took to persevere in college and so earned a bachelor's degree. The problem was that scholarly literature scrutinizing the awareness, resources, and outlooks that African-American men must have to persist in college were limited (Flowers, 2004). This was akin to the inadequate amount of literature depicting in depth experiences of African-American males across higher education (Jackson & Moore, 2006). These gaps in the literature indicated a need for far-reaching examinations to explain what scholars recognized about African-American male persistence, and what higher education institutions must know to nurture students' persistence and increase their graduation outcomes (Tinto, 2005). Minimally, these studies might best enlighten scholars and institutions on the nature of African-American male persistence and possibly shed light on ways to increase their overall retention rates.

Tinto (2005) discussed the importance of using the retention literature to enhance retention outcomes. Flowers (2004) agreed and observed how the absence of research-based information adversely impacts the choices that African-American students make to persist to graduation. He noted:

Researchers and higher education personnel who require evaluative information on the effectiveness of certain theoretical frameworks and research findings for

African-American students are inadequately equipped to make reasonable judgments on the quality, correctness, and worth of research-based information that might have the potential to design services and programs and refine policies to increase the retention rates of African American students. (p. 24)

Flowers (2004) maintained that research-based evidence on African-American students was valuable for shaping their persistence and for strengthening the current retention research literature. Flowers (2004) described the necessity for educators to access information that helps to enhance retention outcomes for African-American students.

Having research-based evidence made it practical for educators to comprehend African-American male persistence and their experiences within the higher education framework. Even with an overabundance of information, understanding African-American male persistence was multifaceted and not easily attributed to a small set of descriptive factors (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). In fact, many factors have been studied to help recognize persistence for any college student. Choy (2002) stated that the most essential factors pertained to parental education, family background, high school GPA, standardized test scores, and institutional characteristics.

Tinto's (1975) Foundational Retention Model, which encompassed similar variables to those previously discussed, is a common frame that attempts to describe African-American male persistence. In testing these variables, scholars regularly found that cognitive factors, such as SAT scores and high school GPAs, could adversely affect African-American student persistence. Entrenched within their argument was the belief that non-cognitive variables were more vital to persistence for these students. For example, D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) established that student background and campus experiences explained persistence for African-American

students, while Townsend (1995) found that significant faculty and student interaction, institutional commitment, and cultural and social support explained minority student persistence and retention. The congruency in findings indicated the importance for scholars to consider an assortment of non-cognitive factors to appreciate the persisting experiences among African-American students.

As a whole, the intricacy of explaining student persistence is not restricted to considering just cognitive and non-cognitive factors. Observers like Kimbrough and Harper (2006) believed that the higher education institution played a role in improving student direction and intensity toward a college degree. They point out the prevalent conviction that predominantly white institutions (PWIs) are accountable for low retention among African-American men. This was hardly the case, given that African-American male retention data at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are comparatively similar to persistence and graduation trends at all colleges and universities nationwide. In 2003, Kimbrough and Harper showed that 14 out of 105 HBCUs indicated African-American student graduation rates above 50% within six years of matriculation. Of the 14 HBCUs, “only seven HBCUs graduated 50 percent or more of their male students” (Kimbrough & Harper, 2006, p. 192). This information confirmed the pattern of low retention among African-American men across the complete higher education continuum. This counterargument, as presented by Kimbrough and Harper (2006), demonstrated the importance of appreciating how personal, psychological, and institutional factors affected African-American male persistence. Institutions that recognized these factors were likely to invest in practical programs and policies that advanced educational outcomes for African-American men (Bean, 2005).

Therefore, it could be argued that institutional investments in retention programs supported the transitions of African-American men from college into the professional workforce. This argument supported the case for preparing these men to enter the workforce. Their presence in the workforce is noteworthy because it affected the pattern of low employment of African-American men with a college degree. Barton and Coley (2010) demonstrated this effect when they studied the relationship between college degree completion and employment for African-American men born between 1970 and 1974. They found that “the employment rate for Black males with 16 years of education is 89 percent” (Barton & Coley, 2010, p. 25), as compared to 68% for Black males with 12 years of education. This employment rate gap showed the importance of more African-American men persisting in higher education.

Although its possession is important in a changing economy, a bachelor’s degree supports a student’s access into the professional workforce. In many instances, the possession of this degree serves as the connection for African-American men to advance in their careers. The labor force literature supported this outlook by identifying a positive relationship between higher education attainment and professional mobility (Teichler, 2009). This correlation provided information why African-American men changed jobs or moved to a different geographic location where their skills were applicable to their work functions (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2005). What made this significant for African-American male degree holders is that they realized the importance of occupational permanence and socioeconomic flexibility when engaged in the workforce (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) stated that professional stability and socioeconomic mobility were desirable for African-American males with a college degree. In many situations, higher earnings were associated with their ability to realize these professional attributes (Callan,

Terry, & Schweitzer, 1995). In addition to opportunities for professional mobility, college graduates have greater opportunities in housing, education, and healthcare (Teichler, 2009). Teichler (2009) found that educated citizens benefit society indicating that college graduates were likely to “support public and private assistance initiatives through their tax dollars and their voluntary giving” (p. 3). These activities were important to society and helped lessen the tax burdens on the people.

Leppel (2002) noted that, in higher education, African-American men typically struggled to pass courses, financed their education with loans, and had trouble balancing school, work, and family responsibilities. Overcoming these issues alone did not drive their persistence. Therefore, institutional outreach, part time employment, and varying degrees of support lessened the difficulties that these men experienced while pursuing their degree.

In addition, retention research in higher education showed that increased student participation in campus life led to greater integration into the social and academic systems of the institution and promoted persistence (Astin, 1985). Educational theorists like Alexander Astin (1985) and Vincent Tinto (1998) indicated the significance of social integration or social involvement in retaining college students. Astin (1985) maintained that student involvement is a characteristic of student retention. Based on his theory, Astin (1985) trusted that, if students were socially involved with campus life, they would persist and graduate.

### **Statement of the Problem**

More and more college students are relying on part-and full-time employment to finance their college education (Brooms & Perry, 2016). Colleges and universities have to face the issue of students spending less time on campus and more time working (Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, & Klingsmith, 2015). Prior research has studied the relationship of student employment to

academic success and persistence (Astin, 1975; Furr & Elling, 2000; King, 1999; Kulm & Cramer, 2006). In addition, first-generation college undergraduates tend to work more hours while going to school are at higher risk for failure and attrition (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perna, 2010; Strayhorn, 2015). However, high-impact practices, such as part-time employment (20 hours or less a week), have the possibility to minimize the impact of detractors on college success and persistence, especially for at-risk students like first-generation African-American male college students.

The problem of this study is that first-generation African-American male college students partake in less high-impact practices than continuing generation college students (Kuh, 2008). Colleges and universities may improve the probability of success by increasing the number of high-impact practices accessible to these students. This study aimed to examine part-time jobs and the likelihood that part-time jobs positively impacted academic success and persistence of first-generation African-American male college students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how part-time employment impacted the academic success and persistence of these African-American male college students. Given that first-generation college students may benefit from participating in more high-impact practices, as well as Kuh's (2008) appeal for institutions to consider how employment might provide a high-impact experience, this study aimed to investigate the relationship that part-time employment effected African-American male college students' persistence.

Research about the impact of part-time employment on students' growth are continuously questioned, despite the fact that one of the central purposes of colleges and universities is to provide a comprehensive offering of activities and services to compliment academic endeavors

(O'Meara & Niehaus, 2009). When the impact of college is only assessed from simple outcomes, such as earning a certain income after graduation, there is little basis for judging whether growth has transpired because of the African-American male students' part-time employment as it relates to persistence.

### **Research Questions**

The fact that a disproportionate number of African-American men fail to persist and earn a bachelor's degree remains a disconcerting problem in undergraduate education (Harper, 2012; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Schwartz & Washington, 2002). Overall, this was in line with the perception that minority students were less likely to persist in college (Stage & Hossler, 2000). The deficit of substantive information in the existing literature inhibited higher education institutions from examining the paths that these men took to earn a bachelor's degree (Flowers, 2004). This deficit required extensive inquiries into the unique experiences around persisting behaviors of African-American men in college, and specifically those enrolled at predominantly White institutions. These inquiries were needed since African-American men are rarely asked how they successfully navigated their way to and through college (Harper, 2012). Qualitative research experiments were beneficial for this undertaking as they divulged meaningful insight about the experiences of African-American men in college (Kimbrough & Harper, 2006).

RQ1 How do African-American males perceive working part-time, while enrolled full-time, to have an impact on their persistence?

RQ2 What factors influenced Africa-American male students to persist through graduation?



## **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

The reason for this study originated from the need to identify and understand strategies used by African-American male undergraduates who are persisting at a predominantly white institution. Knowing these strategies may help researchers and practitioners understand how African-American men navigate predominantly white higher education environments. The findings from this study provided practical insights for young African-American males who expressed an interest in pursuing a bachelor's degree or some other postsecondary education credential. In turn, these young men learned about individuals who were like them, while understanding what it took to persist and be successful in the higher education environment.

This research has the potential to shape retention policies and practices in higher education, as well as inform administrators and practitioners who work with undergraduate African-American male students. Past policy developments have led to increased access and enrollment of African American males and other minority student groups in higher education (Strayhorn, 2008). Access and enrollment policies assisted minority students in gaining access to some form of postsecondary education. Despite the progress, "access cannot be the sole criteria for evaluating society's achievement of equality of educational opportunity" (Donovan, 1984, p. 244). Donovan (1984) advised that a shift was needed from higher education to assess for student persistence in higher education. The statement also identified the need for greater advocacy by retention policies and practices to encourage undergraduate African American men to persist toward graduation. The suggested study topic supports the examination of African-American male persistence, in which some of the findings served as a source for effective retention policies.

## **Definition of Terms**

**African-American male.** Those who self-identify as males having origin in any of the black racial groups in Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

**Attrition.** This term is defined as those student who fails to reenroll at an institution in consecutive terms (Palmer & Young, 2009).

**Degree.** An award conferred by a baccalaureate college or university as official recognition for the successful completion of a program of studies (Narayan, 2011).

**Engagement.** How actively involved or interested students appear to be in their learning process and the process of how they connect their classes, their institution, and each other (Axelson & Flick, 2010).

**Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).** Higher education institutions specifically established to educate African-Americans/Blacks (U.S. Department of Education, 1991).

**Involvement.** The amount of energy and time a student devotes to participating in student organizations, interacting with faculty and peers, studying, using campus facilities (Astin 1985).

**Persistence.** The desire and action of a student to remain at college until graduation (The condition of education, 2017).

**Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs).** Colleges or universities where the student population is primarily White (The condition of education, 2017).

**Retention.** The ability of an institution to keep a student active from admission through graduation (The condition of education, 2017).

**Retention rate.** The rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage (The condition of education, 2017).

**Traditional college students.** Undergraduate students between the ages of 18 – 22 (The condition of education, 2017).

**Undergraduate.** A student enrolled in a four or 5-year bachelor's degree program (The condition of education, 2017).

### **Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

#### **Assumptions**

African American men encounter inexorable persecution and discrimination as part of their everyday college experiences at historically White institutions (Allen, 1992; Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey, 2002). The results shown in multiethnic college surveys revealed that African-American males struggled to survive academically while combating racism (Allen & Solórzano, 2001; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003). Thus, it was assumed that African-American men, who worked part-time while enrolled, were more satisfied and engaged compared to other African-American males who did not work while enrolled.

#### **Delimitations**

A theory, based on these results, were transferable to this population. However, it cannot be generalizable to all African-American males at any predominantly White institution in California nor can it be generalized to African-American females at predominantly White institutions. In addition, the focus of part-time employment as it relates to persistence did not account for other variables that impact persistence, such as GPA.

## **Limitations**

A common weakness of qualitative research is that the design is not capable of controlling the confounding effects of self-selection and lack of random sampling (Newman & Newman, 1994); it is correlational and cannot appropriately confirm causal relationships. Although qualitative methods involve investigation of phenomena until no new information emerges, the constraints of time and expense are limitations of qualitative methods.

## **Summary**

California has some of the most diverse and affordable public colleges and universities in the nation. Surprisingly, the number of students presently registered or who have successfully graduated does not mirror the diversity of the Golden State. High enrollment rates and high tuition have generated many barriers to keep students from earning their bachelor's degree. Such obstacles are of foremost concerns for African-American males because they will become more challenging for students, specifically low-income and first-generation students, to afford and successfully attain their degrees. The problem of persistence among African-American male students has been a challenging one for numerous years with minimal to no action being taken by institutions to find solutions. Although some initiatives and policies have been established, the data still shows a need for more outreach efforts and program implementation for this specific student population to get needed results.

To help African-American male college students persist, the Division of Student Affairs at the research site created the African-American Initiative by implementing a three-fold effort. The first is to grow the pool of African-American applicants to the university. The second is to increase the number of admitted African-American students. The third is to implement strategies that will support retention, persistence, and graduation rates among enrolled African-American

students. One affective aspect of retention and persistence is student employment since the majority of students work during their college careers. Therefore, it is essential to understand how or if working contributes to persistence. There are mixed conclusions about how student employment impacts academic success, campus involvement, and overall well-being due to the variables found in different work environments (Goneya, Kuh, & Pike, 2008; Dundes & Marx, 2006; Kulm & Cramer, 2006; Furr & Elling, 2000). However, general conclusions indicated that part-time, on-campus employment with a schedule between 10 and 20 hours per week is ideal (King, 2006). Employment, under these conditions, supported academic success, student involvement and engagement, and a balanced schedule of academics, work, and personal life. Additionally, on-campus positions that supported future career goals and provided a realistic work experience contributed to student development and successful career preparation (Perozzi, 2009; Kuh, 1995). Thus, the goal of this study was to examine the effects of part-time work on African-American male college students and their persistence.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

### **Introduction to the Literature Review**

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss a wide range of existing literature and previous research on African-American males in higher education to understand why African-American males work while in college and to determine if working part-time was a contributing factor to persistence. The categories used to shape this review provided both a theoretical and practical foundation for the current study. The chapter is divided into seven distinct sections. The first section details the history and demographic trends of African-Americans in higher education. The second section provides an overview of the theoretical models as they impact participation in higher education integration, retention, and departure for African-American male student persistence. The section will also analyze the conceptual framework and its connectivity to persistence and success of African-American male college students. The third section will be the review of research literature and methodological literature. The fourth section will be a review of methodological issues. In section five, a synthesis of research findings will focus on scholarly research about African-American men in higher education and African-American students who work while pursuing postsecondary education. The focus is on African-American students because of the lack of research that focuses on this issue. This section will review both the themes and concepts relevant to institutional engagement and the literature that assesses programs, practices, and initiatives at the college level that may enable access, participation, and success of African-American male college students. The sixth section will critique previous research. In this discussion, the research from the deficit model inquiry on African-American males in higher education will be assessed, and then the current research on what factors led to

African-American males' failure to persist in higher education will be reviewed. The seventh section will be a summary of the chapter.

### **Historical Perspective**

The efforts to educate Black students has spanned over a century. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, W. E. DuBois' *The Soul of Black Folks* (1903) and Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery* (1901) were hailed as classic commentary due to their efforts to address the then "Negro" problem in America. DuBois who was so deeply troubled about the effects of racial disparity and perception on African-Americans, coined the double consciousness (DuBois, 1903). According to DuBois, this double consciousness embodied the two perceptions that the African-American man had regarding himself through his own eyes and through the eyes of White society. The African-American male's sense of always looking at himself through the eyes of others created a sense of negativity. DuBois believed that it was a travesty that the African-American man had to live with this duality while White America had the luxury of living free of it (DuBois, 1903).

Historically, the White American had indicated to African-American males that they were uneducable by refuting them equal educational and work opportunities. Implicitly, much of society and many African-American males thought that African-American males could not fit into the social behavior, intellect, and language of the White male because African-American men had been thought of as more physical than academic (Delpit, 1995). Thus, Lisa Delpit (1995) questioned the ability of white, middle-class teachers to understand and teach African-American and other minority students. She drew on her own experiences as a student, teacher, professor, and researcher to provide vivid examples of prejudice against African-American and other minority students. Delpit (1995) called for reform of teacher education programs,

curriculum, and pedagogy to help eliminate stereotyping in education. She concluded that many African-American males' option to evade college stemmed from a feeling that they were turning from their own culture and embracing the White culture.

### **Demographic and Enrollment Trends of African-American Male College Students**

Within the African-American population, participation in education has long been understood as an instrument for upward mobility. For nearly a century (1885–1965), African-Americans received more education than the previous generation (White & Cones, 1999). This progress languished after 1965, as participation and degree attainment for African-American men progressively dropped, and now this student demographic is one of the lowest for ethnic groups enrolled in higher education. Also, the Public Broadcasting System (Thompson, 2015) reported only 54% of African-Americans graduated from high school compared to more than 75% of their Caucasian and Asian American peers. According to the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (CBCF), African-American males over 17 years of age make up 5.5% of all college students. Of the African-American males who do make it to college, only one in six will graduate with a college degree (Feierman, 2014).

### **Gender Differences**

Cuyet (2006) pointed to the stark disproportion between African-American males and females on college campuses. African-American women have held an advantage in college completion over males for more than 70 years. In 1994, African-American men were more likely than African-American women to be enrolled in college directly after high school. By 2012, the pattern had reversed: The percentage of African-American men enrolled in college remained static, while the percentage of African-American women enrolled in college increased to 69% - a 12 percentage point gap between black men and women.



## **Persistence and African-American Males**

In addition to short falls in enrollments of African-American men in higher education, the ability for this student demographic to persist in college is also an area for worry. Stewart, Lim, and Kim (2015) found that a significant variance exists between male and female persistence during the first three years of college. Stewart, Lim, and Kim (2015) established that females are more likely to return for a second and third year of study in higher education as compared to male peers.

These claims are supported by *Achieving the Dream* (AtD) program data. *Achieving the Dream* involves student populations that tend to be at risk, like students of color and those from low-income families. Data found in a study examining the enrollment and persistence trends and patterns of 2003, *Achieving the Dream* (AtD) minority community college students, indicated that 72% of females returned to a second term of study compared with 68% of males (AtD, 2008, p. 2).

African-American females monitored in this study exhibited a 6% higher persistence rate for a second term than African-American males (Table 1). Overall, African-American males lagged behind their female peers in persistence to a second year of study by 56% to 49%, and a third year of study by 35% to 28% (AtD, 2008).

Table 1

*Percentage of 2003 Achieving the Dream Cohort Persisting to the Second Year and Third Year  
by Gender and Race/Ethnicity*

Ethnicity	Persisted to 2 <sup>nd</sup> term		Persisted to 2 <sup>nd</sup> year		Persisted to 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Nat. American	69.1	61.4	51.3	44.2	35.6	32.5
Asian	74.2	71.8	66.5	65.4	48.8	46.8
Black	70.8	64.5	55.6	48.7	35.1	28.3
White	71.5	67.8	58.9	54.0	41.4	36.0
Hispanic	73.4	68.6	61.0	54.1	34.3	30.5
Other	73.8	69.8	61.3	58.8	41.8	38.3
TOTAL	72.0	67.8	58.9	53.9	38.7	34.2

### **Degree Attainment**

Over a 25-year period between 1977 and 2003, the percentage of African-American males earning a college degree decreased from 43.5% to 32.9% (Harper, 2006). Cook and Cordova (2006) directed a study for the American Council of Education titled *Minorities in Higher Education* that identified that, of all the African-American males who entered community college in 1995 – 1996, only 26.5% earned an associate’s degree or certificate after five years of persistence. This compares to a community college graduation rate of 31.6% in 1989 – 1990 (Cook & Cordova, 2006).

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study was focused on part-time employment and its support of persistence for

African-American men. Hence, persistence theory was the most pertinent lens through which to view the literature and the data collected in this study. Persistence describes behavior for those students who continue to enroll quarter after quarter until they attain their educational goals (Tinto, 2006 – 2007). This term indicates that students are making progress towards their goals. The term retention is interwoven in the persistence literature. A student is considered retained when he or she registers in consecutive terms at the same institution (Tinto, 2006 – 2007).

Attrition is another term frequently used within the persistence literature. This term is used to explain the loss of students due to their dropping out, stopping out, or transferring (Bean & Metzner, 1985). The majority of the studies focusing on African-American male higher education students used critical race theory as the primary theoretical lens and social capital theory the next most used framework.

The notion of persistence is not a new idea in post-secondary education; it has been studied for many years. Two theoretical models of persistence underpin this study. Tinto (1975; 1993; 2000) is the most commonly cited author within persistence theory. His initial framework was based largely on the experiences of traditional White students. The second persistence theorist used to frame this study was H. P. Mason (1998) who took the previous models one step further and created a model that specifically addressed the retention of African-American men in college. Mason's model is more strengths-based and it endeavors to describe why students stay in college to complete their degrees.

### **Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure**

Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure is a pivotal piece of persistence theory based on his earlier work (Tinto, 1975). While his earlier work was fixated exclusively on predominantly Caucasian students at universities, his 1993 model incorporated

some data from colleges and students of color making it more applicable to African-American men who were the focus of this study. Tinto charted the numerous factors that contributed to students leaving college before earning their degrees, which he designated as departure. He indicated that over time these various factors have had different effects. His model highlighted factors contributing to student attrition within an institution and focused on both the social and academic experiences of students.

Tinto (1993) theorized that the interactions between individuals within the social and academic systems of an institution were what led them to depart from college prior to degree completion. For example, at the beginning of a student's enrollment in higher education, family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling were the elements that most predicted departure. Students who came to college academically underprepared or who were first generation college students were more likely to leave. Next, students' goals and commitments were a factor. Persistence was contingent on a student's purpose for attending college: degree attainment, increasing job skills, or pleasing family members. External commitments, such as family responsibilities and employment, were also important in this group.

Factors that induced departure, according to Tinto (1993), were the students' academic and social experiences. A student's ability to pass classes, build relationships with faculty, become involved in extracurricular activities, and make friends on campus affected departure. Considerations such as these helped determine whether or not the student had integrated both academically and socially into college life. The less integrated a student was, the more likely the student would leave. Last, goals and commitments were reassessed. A marginally committed student with weak goals may still choose to leave near the end of his degree.

Tinto's (1993) model is longitudinal and interactional. The strength of his model is that it

endeavored to explain, as well as describe, students who leave before earning their degree. Personal, positive relationships with a professor or family support that lowers the need for external commitments helped students stay in school. Alternately, obstacles such as struggling with remedial math, not being able to fit in with a peer group on campus, or an unfriendly interaction with a sales clerk contributed to a student's decision to leave college. Obstacles and supports could be present within each factor in the model, which can be seen in Appendix B.

What transpires after a student leaves college was not a part of Tinto's (1993) model. This limitation meant that students who leave one college and continue on to earn their degree at another school were not considered as persistent. Tinto was only concerned with students who were retained at one institution or who chose to leave that institution. In fact, Tinto's model prioritized retention. Retention differed from persistence in that a student may persist to degree completion by attending several different institutions, but may not be retained by the first institution he or she enrolled in. Another drawback of Tinto's model was that only voluntary withdrawal from college was addressed, not academic dismissal or administrative withdrawals. Therefore, this model only pertained to a student's decision to depart. The most blatant limitation of this model was its failure to address cultural variables (Guiffrida, 2006). Guiffrida (2006) stressed the need for Tinto's model to be more culturally sensitive and recommended that the model be modified to recognize the importance of "cultural and familial connections" and the interconnectedness of "cultural norms, motivational orientation, and academic achievement and persistence" (Guiffrida, 2006, p. 409). The background variables in Tinto's model were more general and did not account for the nuances within and among cultural groups.

During a student's initial transition into college, family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling are important considerations. (Appendix B) Throughout a student's mid-

schooling, institutional experiences such as academic performance, faculty/staff interactions, extracurricular activities, and peer group interactions become critical concerns (Tinto, 1993). These contribute to a student's overall integration into the institution both academically and socially. In Tinto's research, a student's intentions, goals, and outside commitments were strongly correlated with departure at the beginning and end of college. Tinto (1993) hypothesized that a student's experiences at college were a greater predictor of departure than a student's background characteristics, although these were significant, too. He maintained that retention was achieved when a student was both academically and socially assimilated into the campus community.

There was some disagreement as to the significance of his theory to students of color since the majority of Tinto's sample consisted of White, traditional university students (Strayhorn, 2012). Many studies have sought to prove or disprove its relevance to this population or have used it as a starting place and then modified it for various populations. While Tinto's (1993) framework was a suitable starting point, his theory alone was not enough to address the research questions at the center of this study. The study necessitated a model that concentrated on the experiences of non-traditional students rather than just the general college population because non-traditional students make up the student body at the research site.

### **Mason's Model of African-American Male College Student Persistence**

Mason's (1998) work (Appendix C) was appropriate for this research as the population used to develop his model matched that of this study. In his study of African-American men in college, Mason took into consideration background variables, academic variables, and environmental variables. However, he approached his study from a strengths-based viewpoint and developed a model to determine why students persevered rather than trying to determine

why students leave college like Tinto did. He found that there were four variables that impacted retention:

1. A commitment to and the internalization of an educational goal
2. Outside encouragement from family and friends
3. Utility, which is the belief that education will positively affect the student's life
4. The "helplessness/hopelessness factor" (Mason, 1998, p. 758), which is the belief that no matter what the student does, it will not make a difference in his life and that he has no power or control to change his destiny

This study was supported by the contention that, when studying a specific ethnicity or gender, it cannot be presumed that a general framework is suitable. Whenever feasible, it was preferable to use a model created for the targeted population. Only Mason's (1998) model addressed a factor specifically linked to minority students: the helplessness/hopelessness factor which can be a consequence of suppressed oppression. Even though his model focused on a particular subset of college students, using only his work as the model would be ill-advised. Thus, layering the models on top of each other helped ensure that all potential supports and obstacles that might impact a student's choice to drop out or persevere were considered.

### **Summary of Theoretical Models**

When comparing the two models within persistence theory, many similarities and differences were found (Table 2).

Table 2

*Theoretical Model Comparisons*

Variables	Tinto (1993)	Mason (1998)
Model based on	All students	Black, male, college students
Model predicts	Attrition	Retention
Student background	Family background Skills and abilities Prior schooling	Age Enrollment status High school performance
Psychological considerations	Intentions Goals and institutional Commitment	Educational goals Utility Helpless/hopeless factor
Academic consideration	Academic performance Faculty/staff interactions Academic integration	Study habits Academic advising Absenteeism Major certainty Course availability
Social considerations	Extra-curricular activities Peer group interactions Social integration	
Environmental considerations	External commitments	Finances Employment Outside encouragement Family responsibilities Opportunity to transfer

Using a permutation of these two models was most applicable for the scope of this study. Tinto's (1993) work fixated on post-secondary experiences and was the most broadly employed. Mason (1998) concentrated on the same population as in this study and was the narrowest in scope. Taking both models into account may guarantee that the theoretical lens was broad



enough that pertinent themes were not missed, yet specific enough to make clear that themes relevant to this specific population were integrated. Keeping the study general permitted all data that was relevant to all the categories within the overlapping models to be collected. This research design ensured that significant components of the research site's African-American male population's experiences impacting persistence were not overlooked. This choice was reinforced by the literature review. The interview questions asked participants about their experiences at the research site and gave participants the chance to explicitly address the pertinent variables in persistence theory to establish which served as supports and which served as obstacles. While all three models are over 20 years old, their continued use reflected relevance as they each embodied a seminal work on specific populations.

### **Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

There has been an abundance of research on African-American men in education (Bonner & Bailey, 2016; Harper, 2004, 2005; Harper & Gasman, 2006; Harper & Griffin, 2011; Harris & Harper, 2012; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008; Palmer & Wood, 2013). National interest on the predicament of African-American males has resulted in many conference sessions, think tanks, journal articles, books, and editorials devoted to exploring the complicated factors impacting this group (Harper, 2010). Many college leaders have contextualized challenges in educating African-American males as part of the larger discourse on disparate attainment among minority men. This has resulted in campus initiatives designed to increase the enrollment and success of African-American men (Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

Academic literature has portrayed the achievement of African-American males in higher education as problematic. There has been a sizable amount of research completed on the adjustment, academic achievement, persistence, and rates of enrollment and graduation in

colleges and universities. A large amount of the literature on African-American males and educational backgrounds, however, featured quantitative studies comparing them with other subgroups. Such studies included academic and social comparisons based on race, gender, and institutional type (Davis, 1994; Nettles, Thoeny, & Gosman, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Research was also concentrated on the deficits of African-American males compared to the mainstream culture and it consequently framed their circumstances, characteristics, and habits as absolute and stagnant (Majors & Billson, 1992; Willie, 2003). The concept of human agency as it pertained to African-American males was a noteworthy oversight in much of the literature.

Irrefutably, some African-American males do not exhibit the academic and social skills necessary to be successful in postsecondary endeavors. The quantitative studies that identified qualities, variables, or conditions required for college achievement indicated that the attrition and academic underperformance of African-American males in higher education were due to a multiplicity of factors. These included the absence of social assimilation, financial shortfalls, lack of academic preparedness, and acculturative stress (Cole & Yip, 2008).

However, it has been noted that African-American students' adjustment and lived experiences on campus can only be truly understood by qualitative exploration (Allen, 1992). Many qualitative studies explored the behavior of African-American males who persisted and achieved within a variety of educational structures, including high schools, 2-year colleges, and historically Black and predominately White 4-year colleges and universities (Hrabowski, Maton, & Freeman, 2004). These studies offered an increased understanding of how African-American students experienced specific academic environments. The research also revealed that the perception of racial discrimination and marginalization continued to be noteworthy influences on

African-American male persistence and achievement (Allen, 1992; Hall & Rowan, 2000; Nettles, Thoeny, & Gosman, 1986).

An example of qualitative research was Harper's 2003 study where he interviewed 32 high-achieving African-American males from six predominately White institutions in the Midwest. The participant selection criteria were African-American males with the following attributes: a 3.0 grade point average, an established record of involvement in multiple organizations, earned admiration of peers (as determined by peer elections to campus leadership positions), developed meaningful relationships with faculty and high ranking campus administrators, involved in enriching educational experiences (e.g., student abroad, internship programs, learning communities, and summer research programs), and earned various awards and honors for college achievement (Harper, 2003). In this study, Harper (2003) found that the lack of diversity and noticeable presence of racism and segregation were points of contention.

In 2006, Harper used the data from his 2004 study and interviewed another 32 high-achieving African-American males from six predominately White institutions in the Midwest, using the same selection criteria from his research in 2004. His phenomenological study was intended to understand the perceptions of same race peer support groups for college success and how peer relationships were negotiated. The use of a phenomenological approach was advantageous because it allowed better understanding of the meanings attached by people and their contribution to the development of new theories. Through analysis of semi-structured interviews, Harper (2006) identified three categories that emerged from his study: (a) peer support, (b) outlets for peer support, and (c) leveraged peer support. The findings from Harper's (2006) study showed that peers played a significant role in academic success. The high achievers in the study recounted how the support of their peers considerably improved the

quality of their experiences as high achieving African-American males at predominately White universities.

In 2007, Harper and Quaye re-examined the qualitative data in Harper's original study to establish (a) what role racial identity played in the engagement in organizations, (b) the factors that persuaded these men to select either the mainstream or the culturally based organizations, and (c) how these organizations sustained an expression of African-American identities among this population.

In 2012, Harper started gathering data for the largest-known empirical investigation of African-American male undergraduates. The study examined the experiences of African-American males in an assortment of college and university settings. His National Black Male College Achievement Study was comprised of historically Black public universities, liberal arts colleges, highly selective research universities, public research universities, private historically black colleges and universities, and comprehensive state universities. In total, he amassed qualitative data from 219 successful African-American males from 42 colleges and universities across the nation. He discussed the achievements of the African-American males surveyed at the different college campuses and gave recommendations for improving African-American male persistence in college. Furthermore, despite low teacher expectations, inadequate academic preparation for college-level work, racist and culturally insensitive campus environments, and the encumbering consequences of stark underrepresentation, there were still African-American males who successfully maintained efforts toward degree completion (Harper, 2012).

Lee's (2009) qualitative case study examined the perceptions of 19 African-American males on collaborative learning as a method to increase academic success and degree attainment. The case study was valuable as it was based on real-life circumstances and resulted in a rich and

complete account of a phenomenon. Furthermore, it presented data and highlighted meanings that increased the readers' understanding. To successfully gather participants' experiences, Lee (2009) created a survey questionnaire, an interview protocol, and an observation protocol. Data for this study was gathered through focus groups, classroom observations, phone calls, and individual interviews. The participants all claimed that their race never played a role in the classroom, though they may have represented the African-American race in the classroom due to the lack of diversity. The participants also revealed how their involvement at the institution offered access to like-minded peers who were dedicated to supporting African-Americans in need. This network of support reinforced their abilities to interact with diverse cultures, and therefore, they flourished both academically and socially.

Harris' (2007) qualitative research evaluated the effect of mentoring in encouraging persistence among 12 African-American males in their junior or senior year at a predominately White public institution in the eastern region of the United States. Specifically, the study was evaluating whether currently successful African-American males were significantly influenced by and persisted through college due to mentoring. The findings revealed mentoring with peers who knew and understood the college system was valuable to the persistence of these students at the university. Mentoring also played a role in fostering supportive relationships with faculty and staff. Mentoring relationships also assisted with overcoming the many academic and social challenges a student confronts in college (Harris, 2007). The participants confirmed that mentoring influenced their academic success, confidence, self-concept, and higher self-esteem. Mentoring also kept them motivated and encouraged to thrive in college.

Griffin's (2006) qualitative study of nine African-American students registered in the Honors Program at a large research university on the east coast sought to recognize their sources

of motivation and discernments of how those sources contributed to persistence and academic achievement. Since this was a sociological multi-case study, the data from each participant was gathered as an individual case study to compare each participant and to increase the validity of the findings (Griffin, 2006). With purposeful methods, the nine participants were selected to offer the most insight into the phenomenon being studied. Through coding, the findings specified that all of the participants shared common themes when categorizing the influences in their lives. The students identified both internal and external causes of motivation that helped them persevere. Participants clarified how self-motivation and yearning for future career goals and ambitions helped them to stay focused. They communicated that their motivation was first internally developed and played a major role in their success (Griffin, 2006).

In addition to Griffin's (2006) study, Palmer et al.'s (2011) qualitative research intended to recognize the factors that 11 academically underprepared African-American males, who entered an HBCU and persisted to graduation, credited to their success. The findings of the study produced two themes around the sources of motivation (Palmer et al., 2011). First, the family members' demonstrated the significance of going to college for the purpose of obtaining both a baccalaureate degree and a post-baccalaureate degree. The family members shared their experiences in college and enthusiastically supported the students throughout their academic journey. Second, while some of the participant's family members lacked the educational background and experience, they still were successful in motivating and supporting them (Palmer et al., 2011).

Participants in Griffin's (2006) and Palmer, Davis, and Maramba's (2011) studies attributed family support as a significant factor for academic success. The families offered

motivation, an early yearning to be academically prosperous, and role modeling to impress upon them the importance of an education (Griffin, 2006; Palmer et al., 2011).

### **Review of Methodological Issues**

Qualitative research is a term with varying meanings in educational research. Borg and Gall (1989) proposed that the term is frequently used interchangeably with terms such as naturalistic, ethnographic, subjective, and post-positivistic. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) chose to use ethnographic as a term for research using qualitative methods and also to mean ethnographies. However, Savenye and Robinson (2004) defined qualitative research as research dedicated to increasing the understanding of human systems, whether they are large or small. Qualitative research studies usually include ethnographies, case studies, and descriptive studies. They often are called ethnographies, but these are somewhat more specific. For instance, Goetz and LeCompte (1984) defined ethnographies as “analytic descriptions or reconstructions of intact cultural scenes and groups” (p. 2). A case study may be considered ethnography; however, the researcher may have set out to answer a particular question rather than to describe a group or scene as a whole. Qualitative research methods normally contain interviews and observations but may also comprise case studies, surveys, and historical and document analyses.

Qualitative research has several key characteristics: it is conducted in a natural setting without deliberately manipulating the environment, and it typically involves highly comprehensive rich descriptions of human behaviors and opinions. The perception is that humans create their own reality, and an understanding of what they do may be based on why they believe they do it. There is allowance for the multiple realities individuals construct in an environment. The research questions often change as the study does because the researcher wants to know “what is happening” and may not want to prejudice the study by focusing the

study too narrowly. The researcher must be open to the subjects' insights of "what is"; that is, researchers are bound by the principles and worldviews of the participants. In qualitative research, it is not necessarily presumed that the findings of one study may be generalized easily in other settings.

With regards to qualitative research, Creswell (2007), Richards and Morse (2007), Merriam (2009), and Glesne (2011) were most informative because they classified popular contemporary methodologies, defined unique characteristics of each, and provided recommendations as to how to choose between them when planning a research study. Creswell (2007) thoroughly outlined the use of five approaches (narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study) resulting from a lifetime of work both conducting research and teaching and mentoring students on qualitative methods. Likewise, Merriam (2009) outlined six approaches (basic qualitative research, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative analysis, critical research, and case study) in her fully conceptualized text on qualitative research methods. Richards and Morse (2007) offered practical overviews of phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory while Glesne (2011) covered five "interpretive traditions of qualitative inquiry" (p. 16) including ethnography, life history, grounded theory, case study, and action research. Roulston (2001) and Boyatzis (1998) focused on thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is used in qualitative data analysis, which identifies patterned meaning across a dataset. Important references considered when getting started are for basic qualitative research, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, case study, narrative, and critical research.

However, a major problem in much of the work on developing assessment criteria for qualitative research has been the propensity to treat it as a unified field at the data collection level and at the methodological approach level (Dixon-Woods, Shaw, Agarwal, & Smith, 2004).



The problem is that some of the most significant qualities of qualitative research can be the most difficult to measure. In addition, it could be poorly interpreted and provide little understanding into the phenomenon being reviewed. However, a second study may be unsound concerning the transparency of methodological practices and yet offer a convincing, vivid, and astute narrative grounded in the data. Hence, it is critical to take into account the specific features of qualitative research when contemplating the most suitable way of evaluating it.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

#### **Scholarly Research on African-American Men in Higher Education**

The literature on African-American students in higher education before 2000 fixated mainly on enrollment inequalities of collegiate ethnic groups as well as research on the gender gap in enrollment for African-American men and women (Allen, 1992; Cuyjet, 2006; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Guiffrida, 2006). In the last decade, researchers began to shift their attention to the experiences of African-American male students. Since 2000, studies of African-American college students have focused on certain hypotheses in higher education that impact African-American enrollment, persistence, academic achievement, and educational experience. These studies explored variables such as offering academic support and services for African-American college students (Duncan, 2005; Flowers, 2006; Swail, 2000) and creating a community containing welcoming educational environments (Flowers, 2006). Even more has been written on factors connected to the African-American experience, such as feelings of insecurity, alienation, and invisibility (Cuyjet, 2006; Strayborn, 2008), unwelcoming environments (Constantine, Robinson, Wilton & Caldwell, 2002), and faculty neglect (Flowers, 2004; Guiffrida, 2006).

More recently researchers have started to separate the experiential variables that impact the African-American male college students' experiences from the rest of the African-American

college student experience. In 1997, Cuyjet authored a book on how to assist African-American men to succeed in college. This research began to alter the emphasis from the shortcomings these male students brought to higher education and put responsibility on how to find solutions to why these under represented students fail to prosper at universities and colleges. Following Cuyjet's work, studies were conducted to assess institutional practices that affected attainment outcomes in African-American male students, such as use of academic support, participation in purposeful co-curricular activities, collegiate athletics participation, identity development, and peer development.

To understand the literature on African-American male college students, historical and current research was scrutinized and critiqued by focusing attention both on the obstacles African-American men face or deficits they bring to higher education and the research and scholarship on the institutional practices that were affecting African-American men.

The literature outlined barriers in higher education that numerous African-American males experienced (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2006; Cook & Cordova, 2006). These barriers included inadequate financial resources, poor academic preparation, and the absence of positive role models. These barriers are reasons why African-American male college students may fail in higher education.

### **Limited Financial Resources**

A predicament many African-American males face as they enter colleges is that, apart from navigating many pre-college or developmental courses, they are additionally encumbered with balancing work and family responsibilities. Gardenhire, Collado, Martin, and Castro (2010) found that being financially independent was a primary concern or risk factor that threatened

engagement, persistence in school, and completion of a degree for African-American male college students.

The study was completed at four nonresidential community college campuses in the southeast and southwest. Each of these campuses met the following criteria: (a) joined Achieving the Dream as a Round 1 college in 2004, (b) had a substantial population of students of color, (c) expressed an interest in participating in this study, and (d) had an institutional interest in this student subcategory.

Gardenhire, Collado, Martin, and Castro's (2010) methodology consisted of intensive qualitative methods to survey a specific group of people. Using individual and group interviews, the qualitative researchers sought to gain a detailed understanding of the conditions experienced by the subjects. In three rounds of fieldwork over one year, the researchers of this qualitative inquiry found the following themes: academic preparedness, motivation for going to college, cultural identity, college expectations, student engagement, social connectedness and support, developmental and other classroom experiences, relationships with faculty and staff, and external pressures, including work, family, peers, and finances.

To provide context for the experiences of the males in their sample, much of the inquiry was concentrated on learning more about their backgrounds, their educational and work histories, their relationships with family and friends, their experiences in their respective communities, and how these factors influenced their decisions to go to college. The researchers revealed that these men's backgrounds created their identity, behavior, and choices as individuals and as college students. Understanding how these students responded to college-related experiences is essential, if colleges are to respond effectively to their needs.

Three field visits took place during the 2007 – 08 academic year along with three to five focus groups during each visit. The size of each focus group ranged from three to twelve males with a total sample of 87 students. The study was intended to target the same set of students over the course of the school year to capture the range of problems they faced during this time. During the final round of focus groups, students responded to questions about their trials as college students and proposed their own resolutions. In addition, 29 of the 87 students were interviewed independently during the field visits to gather more comprehensive information about their personal experiences.

Focus groups were also held with developmental math faculty and advisers at four campuses to gain their viewpoints on the problems faced by underprepared African-American males. All focus groups and interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, coded, and scrutinized for themes. The research team also visited classrooms and tutoring centers at all campuses along with various minority male support groups. Finally, demographic and transcript data on student participants were collected.

The participants regularly reported that making ends meet as college students was a chief concern for them. They fretted about paying college and living expenses, and many needed to support themselves and their families. While their desire for self-reliance is in many ways admirable, it also encumbered their ability to engage fully in school. This made it harder for them to achieve their educational goals. Remarkably, the literature acknowledged being financially independent as a risk factor that can threaten engagement, persistence in school, and graduation from college.

A majority of the participants worked full time and attended college part time. Most of them clarified that they worked to support their families. These participants were largely family

men and even some of the younger ones who did not have families of their own felt an obligation to support their parents, grandparents, and extended families. Whether they still lived at home or not, few men in the sample reported that they looked to parents for help with college costs or living expenses. Masculine as well as racial and ethnic cultural values reinforced the expectation that these men should work.

Since earning money to support a family was imperative to these men, the amount of time they needed to dedicate to employment was a major problem for them. Working full time and attending college part time are two risk factors the literature connected with preventing students from persisting in school. A significant measure of student engagement was the amount of time and effort students put into their studies. Since many of these students were working many hours, they recounted only being able to spend the necessary amounts of time on campus to attend classes and negligible amounts of time on homework and studying outside of class. Balancing work and school was the greatest challenge of college for many of these students.

In addition to earning money to support a family and having access to assistance from fellow students, staff, and faculty were critical for student achievement. These men recounted, however, that they were not committed to making friends or connecting with faculty on campus. Many were working full time off campus and spending fewer hours on their studies than they needed to be fruitful. To further complicate the issue, many of the students recounted difficulty asking for assistance. Many specified that they felt they must and would triumph on their own. They felt that asking for assistance from others was in direct conflict with their notions of being their “own man”. Most of the students in this study were much more likely to be giving financial support to their families than asking for it. The breadwinner role was one they were quite

comfortable playing. Many saw asking for money as “freeloading” and reported they would rather struggle to make ends meet than ask for financial assistance.

### **Financial Assistance and African-American Males**

The literature revealed that African-American males had trouble asking for help not only with their academic pursuits but also with their financial constraints (Harris & Harper, 2012; Wood, 2011). To ease this obstacle in looking for financial assistance, colleges should offer informational sessions during orientation about money management, balancing work and school, and how to apply for financial aid.

The research of Zeidenberg, Jenkins, and Calcagno (2007), followed by Shugart and Romano (2008), confirmed that student success courses help the transition process for first-year students and equipped those students with the social skills essential for integration, community and network building, academic preparedness and financial planning, and work-school time management skills. By enrolling in this type of college orientation course, African-American men who worked while in college gained access to institutional resources, such as childcare, Pell grants, and scholarship information that can lessen the burden of trying to live financially independent and achieving academic goals.

### **Poor Academic Preparation**

Before students have the opportunity to make a decision about whether they will attend college, they must meet minimum standards. Hoxby (2004) identified six steps required for college attendance: “graduating from high school, a sufficient grade point average for admission, SAT registration, SAT testing with a satisfactory score for admission, acceptance of application for admission, and completion of financial aid if required” (p. 367). The absence of any one of these variables adversely influence higher education acceptance. Likewise, in their investigation

about the likelihood of middle school students continuing to college, Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) recognized three critical tasks: (a) “acquiring at least minimal college qualification, (b) actually graduating from high school, and (c) applying to a 4-year college or university” (p. 119).

In addition, students required access to high-level courses with superior instruction to train them for the rigors of college by increasing their content knowledge and fostering their higher order thinking skills. The connection between taking more coursework and college readiness is well documented (Howell, Kurlaender, & Grodsky, 2011; Musoba, 2011). Students who have access to college-level academics in high school were more likely to pursue and thrive in higher education (McGee, 2013; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). Too many schools with a high level of minority enrollments do not offer these courses making it difficult for students to garner the academic skills required to succeed in college.

Thus, a common concern among high school staff is that, despite college preparatory courses being accessible, African-American male students were underrepresented in the enrollment in these courses. Often, African-American students were directed into lower level courses instead of college preparatory classes (Moore et al., 2010). This resulted in two primary issues for minorities: lack of preparation in the earlier grades and lower teacher expectations.

A study conducted by Lynn et al. (2010) to answer the question, “How does a low-performing high school in a low-performing school district cope with the persistent problem of African-American male underachievement?” revealed that the school personnel overwhelmingly criticized students, their families, and their communities for the achievement gap. The school studied was saturated in a culture of defeat and ineptitude. Continuing conversations with a smaller group of teachers dedicated to the achievement of African-American male students

disclosed that the school was not a safe space for compassionate teachers who desired to make a difference in the lives of their students.

The study drew from Duncan's (2002) notion of critical race ethnography as a method to understand the explicit context in which African-American male students experience forms of subordination in school. The use of critical race ethnography was intended to tease out how race, gender, and other factors such as social class become relevant as both markers of identity and tools of domination and subordination for marginalized groups (Duncan, 2002). Ultimately, the investigators came to the conclusion that school personnel overwhelmingly blamed students, their families, and their communities for the minority achievement gap.

### **Working During College**

Working during college may impact the lives of learners by providing a setting to apply classroom learning to strengthen students' bonds with colleagues as well as with faculty or staff (Astin, 1999). Campus employment may expand and deepen a student's support network. In addition, work commitments require students to budget their time efficiently (Curtis & Shani, 2002). Last, employers may favor students who have workplace experience because it is in those settings that students have occasion to apply what they have learned in class and demonstrate their ability to perform in messy, unstructured situations, and work successfully with others.

A study by McCormick, Moore, and Kuh (2010) analyzed first-year and senior students to investigate the impact of work at two distinct points in their educational careers. Scrutinizing the first-year students permitted the researchers to evaluate work from the perspective of the transition to college while assessing seniors permitted them to evaluate participation in certain enriching educational experiences that were not usually accessible to first-year students. The study also addressed the risk of selection bias that could result from a restricted focus on seniors



who have thrived in college. The data studied is limited to enrolled students, which limited the results to those who made it to the spring of the first or senior year.

Using data from the 2008 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), McCormick, Moore, and Kuh (2010) stated that student engagement was measured using five benchmarks: academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environments. They also examined three scales that portrayed how students characterized their collegiate growth in knowledge, skills, and development. The three domains are general education, personal and social development, and practical competence. In addition, grade point average (GPA) was considered.

The researchers used multivariate analyses that were comprised of hours worked, age, gender, race/ethnicity, first-generation status, transfer status, on-campus residence, and the highest degree attained by either parent. Institutional variables consisted of Carnegie Classification; Barron's admissions selectivity; urbanicity a 7 point scale ranging from rural to large city); control (public or private); and a set of contextual characteristics such as percent female, percent transfer, percent full time, percent residential, and percent first generation. The first set of variables revealed the differences in institutional mission, setting, and financing that can affect who attends and what kinds of employment opportunities may be accessible by students. The contextual variables likewise captured institutional level differences in the student population that can be correlated to the services available to students, which in turn can affect processes and outcomes. Controlling for the institutional variances permitted the researchers to isolate specific impact of different amounts of on and off-campus work, independent of the specific institutional setting.

The researchers found that employment was common among first-year and senior students. Nearly half of first-year students (46%) and three out of four seniors (75%) reported working for pay during a typical week. In addition, off-campus employment was more common than work on-campus. About one-third of first-year students worked off-campus compared with one in five who worked on-campus. More than half of seniors worked off-campus while roughly one in three worked on-campus. Considering hours worked across job locations, first-year students worked 1–10, 11–20, or more than 20 hours per week. Nearly one-third of seniors worked more than 20 hours per week. Only 2–5% worked on-campus for more than 20 hours a week. Work was common among students at both public and private institutions, and marginally more common at private schools where 51% first-year students and 78% seniors worked for pay. However, students at public institutions worked more hours. Fifteen percent of first-year students and 32% of seniors at public institutions worked more than 20 hours per week, compared with 11% and 28%, respectively, at private schools. Moreover, the researchers found that first-year students at private schools are nearly twice as likely as their counterparts to work on campus. The same was found for seniors at private schools. This suggested that private institutions are more successful at offering employment opportunities for their undergraduates.

Working was found to be a more common trait among first-generation students than any others. First-generation students were also more likely to work more hours and to work off-campus. First-generation seniors worked at least 30 hours per week, and work was more common among first-year and senior commuting students. In addition, it was also found that commuting students worked long hours. One in five commuting seniors worked more than 30 hours per week. In addition, two out of three first-year and senior students held off-campus jobs.

Students who were living away from campus, working off-campus, and having substantial work commitments while enrolled raised concerns about being able to gain maximum benefit from the college experience. Causing particular unease was the effect of those constraints on networking with faculty outside of class, partaking in cultural and cocurricular activities, and using campus support resources.

Results revealed that for first-year and senior students who had interactions with faculty had the strongest relationship, followed by active and collaborative learning and enriching educational experiences. These results confirmed prior findings that work on-campus are educationally beneficial. Contrary to previous research, however, McCormick, Moore, and Kuh (2010) found a positive effect for students working more than 20 hours per week. One reason for this counterintuitive finding was that having considerable work commitments forced students to manage their time better so as to maximize the benefit of their academic time. Those with the heaviest commitments were those who could most effectively manage multiple obligations. In addition, off-campus employment indicated a positive relationship with four of the five benchmarks for first-year students, and a negative relationship between working off-campus more than ten hours and the last benchmark, supportive campus involvement. Lastly, five percent of first-year and 10% of seniors reported having both on and off-campus jobs. For these students, work indicated a strong positive relationship with active and collaborative learning, student faculty interaction, and enriching educational experiences.

### **Discussion and Implications for Practice**

Working during college is now the norm for undergraduates in the United States (King, 2006). Nearly half of first year students and three-quarters of seniors attending 4-year colleges and universities reported working for pay. Thus, the findings from this study both confirmed and

contradicted conventional wisdom about the relationships between work and schooling. Working on or off campus was positively related to several dimensions of student engagement. Those who were employed on campus typically benefited more than their counterparts who worked off-campus. However, contrary to expectations, some of the stronger positive effects on engagement were for students working more than 20 hours per week on campus. More surprising, the largest net gains in engagement were from students who reported working both on and off campus. After controlling for student and institutional characteristics, the researchers found some negative associations between off-campus work and students' perceptions of the campus environment.

Additionally, it was found that working on campus for up to ten hours per week was associated with slightly higher self-reported grades, while more than 20 hours per week of on-campus work corresponded to slightly lower grades. Given the positive relationships between work and several measures of student engagement and between engagement and selected educational outcomes, the benefits of work during college appeared to be mediated by student engagement. This intimated that one possible productive way to enhance the positive benefits of work and study was to induce students to intentionally connect what they were learning in class with experiences in the work setting.

### **Effects of Work on African-American College Students' Engagement**

Although research describing the characteristics and experiences of African-American male students who worked while attending college was inadequate, there was an overabundance of data portraying the work intensity of African-American students who worked while enrolled in college. Data from the NPSAS revealed that only 28% of African-American male students and 26% of African-American female students did not work while enrolled in 2003 – 2004. In

addition, while the current body of research increased understanding of the effect on student outcomes of working while enrolled, additional research is necessary to address the gap between working in college and African-American male students' persistence (Horn & Nevill, 2006). Given the absence of research assessing the influence of working during college on African-American male students' persistence and the need for culture-specific research on the effects of college on African-American male students, the study conducted by Flowers, Osterlind, Pascarella, and Pierson (2001) used nationally representative data from the National Survey of Student Engagement to assess the direct impact of work on African-American students' self-reported academic engagement in college. Controlling for hypothetically confounding academic and nonacademic variables, this cross-sectional study estimated the relationship among the number of hours African-American students spent working on and off-campus and their involvement in practices that research has shown to enhance students' academic and social development in college. The main purpose of this study was to assess the direct impact of working on and off-campus on African-American students' self-reported engagement in college. The expectations were that the results might produce recommendations for enriching the educational outcomes of African-American students who work while enrolled in college.

Building on previous research conducted to assess the impacts of college attendance on student development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005), the researchers addressed the following two questions:

1. What extent does working anywhere influence African-American students' engagement in intellectually stimulating activities in college?

2. What are the effects of working in college on student engagement for African-American students by gender, college racial composition, residence status, and athletic participation?

The findings of the study indicated that students who are scholastically and socially engaged in college are more likely to mature in an educationally appropriate manner (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Hence, many studies that surveyed student engagement employed most of the same variables that other researchers used to investigate the effect of college on student development and educational outcomes (Furr & Elling, 2000; Pascarella et al., 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). For this study, the terms student development and student engagement were utilized interchangeably to demarcate desirable patterns of student involvement in college and meaningful personal and intellectual growth.

The conceptual framework for this study presumed that four sources impact students' engagement: (1) precollege characteristics, (2) institutional characteristics, (3) students' academic experiences in college, and (4) students' nonacademic experiences in college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). A small portion of this research intimated that student background variables and precollege characteristics mediate the impacts of college on postsecondary outcomes (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; 2005; Tinto, 1993). As such, the conceptual framework for this study was based on the belief that background and precollege qualities influenced African-American students' engagement.

Another area of college student development research suggested that students' academic aptitudes in college were important factors in understanding student development results (Astin, 1993, Laird, Bridges, Morelon-Quainoo, Williams, & Holmes, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini,

1991, 2005; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1995). Therefore, in this study, proxy variables were used to account for these kinds of academic factors.

Data from the 2004 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was used for this study. The National Survey of Student Engagement was created to measure students' participation in educational opportunities that prior research has connected to desired educational outcomes (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kuh, 2001, 2003). This dataset consisted of data from a national sample of college students. In 2004, there were about 163,000 students who were randomly chosen from files provided by the 472 participating colleges and universities. In this study, data from 4,598 African-American students were examined. Of the total number, 38% worked on-campus, and 48% worked off-campus.

The principal independent variables were students' self-reports of the numbers of hours they spent working on and off-campus per week. The dependent variables contained four composite measures of self-reported student engagement during college that were chosen based on their use in a number of studies evaluating student engagement in college (Laird et al., 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This study also included multiple control variables. The first sets of control variables were gender and age. The second set contained students' perceptions of the degree to which the institution offered academic support, perceptions of the magnitude to which the institution offered help with nonacademic problems, perceptions of the degree to which the school offered support to allow students to prosper socially on campus, and college racial makeup. Students' year in school, major, enrollment status, and grades represented the third set of control variables. The analytical model also incorporated students' Greek affiliation, college residence, and participation in athletics. Such investigations were significant for at least two reasons. First, they enhanced a number of studies testing the validity of links between

engagement hypotheses and desired student outcomes. Second, the study provided findings, conclusions, and recommendations for academics and administrators concerned with the quality of the first year of college.

The analytical methods used for this study were based on previous research (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). In the first stage of analysis, least squares regression was utilized to estimate the direct effects of working on and off-campus on African-American students' involvement in educational activities. The second stage of data analysis found interactions among the variables in the conceptual framework and outcome variables. Due to the large sample size of this study, results were reported significant at  $p < .001$ .

This study resulted in two major findings. African-American college students' engagement was positively correlated to working on-campus and taking out the influence of working on-campus, working off-campus also positively influenced the magnitude which students engaged in educational experiences on campus, but to a lesser degree than engagement. Thus, these findings specified that time spent working on and off-campus were advantageous for African-American students.

### **Critique of Previous Research**

Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure has been a commonly cited theory for describing the student departure process and has reached "near paradigmatic status" in the field of higher education (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000, p. 107). However, empirical research offered only modest support for its propositions (Braxton & Lee, 2005). Moreover, it failed to understand cultural variables made it especially challenging when applied to minority students (Guiffrida, 2005; Kuh & Love, 2000; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000).



One noteworthy cultural constraint of the theory was that students need to “break away” from past relationships and traditions to become assimilated into the college’s social and academic environments. Tierney (1992) contended that “breaking away” was not relevant to minority college students because the model was intended to explain developmental progression within a culture rather than acclimatization from one culture to another. Given the minority students’ cultural backgrounds frequently differed from the Eurocentric frameworks upon which the standards and values at predominantly White institutions were founded, Tierney (1992) reasoned that Tinto’s (1993) theory was possibly damaging to minority students because it encouraged their departure from cultural traditions and supportive interactions. Additionally, it can be further claimed that Tinto’s (1993) theory, which was embedded in the Western assimilation/enculturation paradigm, discounted bicultural integration, or the capacity of minority students to thrive at college while still being a part of both the majority and minority cultures (Kuh & Love, 2000; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). Thus, the continued expansion of Tinto’s (1993) theory and incorporation of additional psychological and cross-cultural viewpoints were necessary to improve the theory, particularly when applying it to minority students (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997).

In addition to Tinto’s (1993) theory, Mason’s (1998) study of persistence for African-American males in an urban community college was the first study that concentrated especially on African-American men in community colleges. Mason (1998) offered an empirical model of persistence using a sample of urban African-American men from a Chicago community college. This study served as the foundation of research on men of color in community colleges and continues to inform empirical and scholarly dialogue. However, Mason’s theory was too narrowly focused on the psychological and environmental factors that determined persistence

among African-American males at community colleges; it failed to account for the students' role in persistence at a predominantly White, large public university.

The fact that the present literature offered little research on African-Americans further moderated when males were studied in educational research. Many higher education institutions researchers use the work of Vincent Tinto as a guide to better understand retention and attrition rates for all students.

## **Chapter 2 Summary**

College persistence is an unrelenting issue in higher education today. The annual cost of college tuition for the research site for a full-time student was \$14,046 in 2016. That cost along with the cost increases for textbooks, instructional supplies, course fees, transportation, and healthcare expenses have been a mandate requiring that African-American males must work either part-or full-time while attending school. Nearly four out of five college students were working part-time while attending college full-time and averaging 19 hours a week of work (US Dept. of Labor, 2013). However, there was very little research on African-American male students in universities (Bush & Bush, 2005, 2010; Wood, 2010; Wood & Turner, 2011). Even fewer studies have examined the intersection of work and college of African-American men.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction to Chapter 3**

The dropping of college completion rates is a national concern. The achievement gap is not exclusively an issue in the K-12 system but it starts there and continues into college (Leach & Williams, 2007). However, the impact of working during college on career success after graduation has been mostly positive (Geel & Gellner, 2012; Sagen, Dallam, & Laverty, 2000). Davis (2012) found that seniors in college had the strongest connection to the labor force. They were the most likely to work for pay all through college, and they reported working the most hours while enrolled. Seniors were also the most likely to specify that their work be connected to their academic pursuits. Also, Davis (2012) discovered that students whose college job was related to their academic interests had higher salaries after graduation. They also had a higher probability of working in an industry that matched their college major. Although scholars have discovered an increasing interest in student employment among college students (Davis, 2012; Planty et al., 2008; Kulm & Cramer, 2006), this researcher was not able to find any study that focused on how student employment impacted African-American male college students and if it was a contributing factor in African-American male college students' persistence.

This study was used to explore persistence with a sample of graduated African-American males to determine if part-time employment was a contributing factor for persistence at a predominantly White university. A better understanding of this phenomenon would allow administrators and educators to become more informed on how African-American men earn a bachelor's degree. In seeking to understand their behaviors, this study addressed one primary question and one sub question.

## **Research Questions**

The fact that a disproportionate number of African-American men fail to persist and earn a bachelor's degree remains a disconcerting problem in undergraduate education (Harper, 2012; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Schwartz & Washington, 2002). Overall, this was in line with the perception that minority students were less likely to persist in college (Stage & Hossler, 2000). The deficit of substantive information in the existing literature inhibited higher education institutions from examining the paths that these men took to earn a bachelor's degree (Flowers, 2004). This deficit required extensive inquiries into the unique experiences around persisting behaviors of African-American men in college, and specifically those enrolled at predominantly White institutions. These inquiries were needed since African-American men are rarely asked how they successfully navigated their way to and through college (Harper, 2012). Qualitative research experiments were beneficial for this undertaking as they divulged meaningful insight about the experiences of African-American men in college (Kimbrough & Harper, 2006).

RQ1 How do African-American males perceive working part-time, while enrolled full-time, to have an impact on their persistence?

RQ2 What factors influenced African-American male students to persist through graduation?

## **Purpose and Design of the Study**

Qualitative research has many objectives within the scope of exploring phenomena. One is to “achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process of meaning making...and describe how people interpret what they experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 14). Another objective pointed out by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) is that qualitative research seeks to “answer questions that stress how social experiences were created

and given meaning” (p. 10). Irrespective of the objectives, qualitative research focused on understanding a phenomenon of interest from the participants’ voices and perspectives, and not the researcher’s (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Qualitative research is fundamentally grounded in a constructionist epistemology. Constructionism suggested that people “construct” meaning from how they interact with the world. These meanings were typically fashioned in different ways, and even in response to the same phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). The constructed meanings led the “researcher to look for the complexity of [people’s] views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). A theoretical perspective was necessary to comprehend and clarify these findings.

The researcher employed case study research as it was “an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon set within its real-world context” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). The case study method allowed the researcher to better understand the context of the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2009). Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggested that, in a case study, the researcher must understand the deeper perspectives that could be captured through interactions. By using semi-structured interviews, the researcher assessed the case through the lens of each participant. Case studies have been used to organize a wide range of information and then to analyze the contents by seeking patterns and themes. Analysis of this research was guided by inductive reasoning, relationships, and themes, which resulted in a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study.

As conflicting to a quantitative study, a qualitative method allowed greater investigative research but necessitated a tolerance for ambiguity. A qualitative inquiry offered the researcher the opportunity to gain awareness into the first-hand perspective of African-American male

students at a predominantly White institution, thereby creating a portrait of their experiences. Creswell (1994) maintained that quantitative researchers should be detached and independent of that which is being studied, while qualitative researchers need to interact with those being researched to gain an understanding of how students make sense of their lives and experiences. The qualitative approach, according to Stake (2010), is substantiated in the philosophical orientation called phenomenology, which is focused on an individual's experiences from his personal perspective.

This study, which sought to examine the phenomenon of persistence among a sample of graduated African-American men, fits well with the strengths of case studies. The intent of this examination was to inform higher education on ways to foster persistence among African-American males. The purpose of this bounded case study is to identify all the problems African-American male college students experience during college. The findings may help colleges improve the quality of their programs for African-American males to help ensure that they persist to graduation.

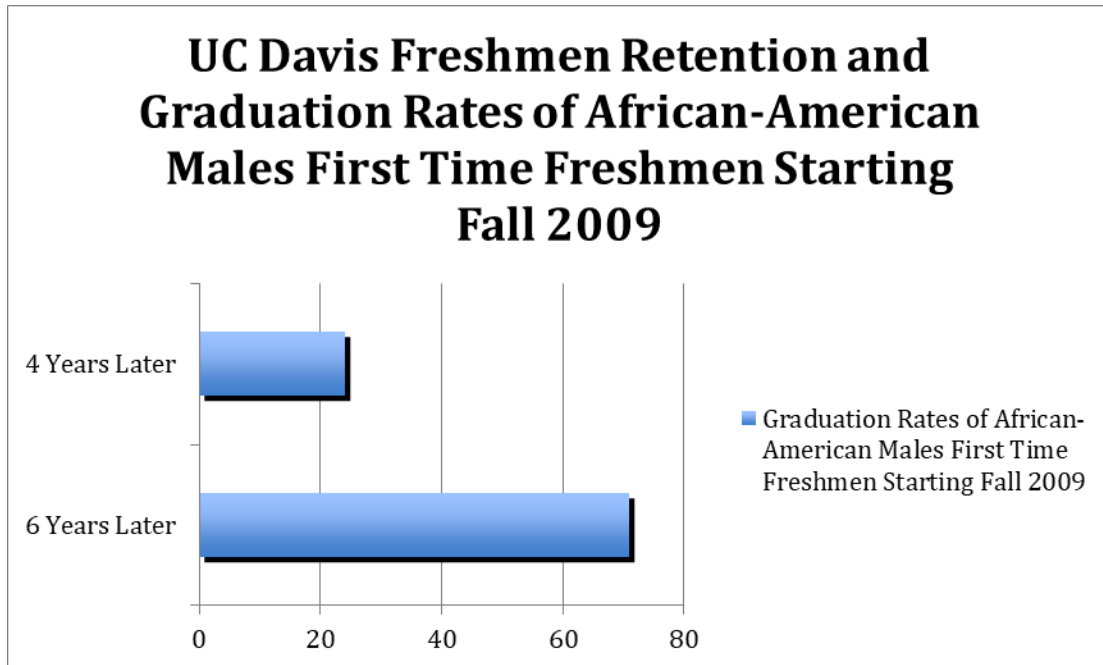
### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

The study was conducted on the campus of the University of Divinity, a large 4-year public university in northern California. During the Fall of 2015, there was a total of 35,186 students, of which were 984 African-American students. Table 2 displays the 2014 graduation rates of African-American males entering freshmen at the research site in 2009. The 4-year graduation rate for African-American males was 23%. The six-year graduation rate for African-American males was 70% (Student Profile, 2015). The research site was selected as the context for this study because of its developing African-American Initiative created due to the sharp decline in the enrollment of African-Americans following Proposition 209. Proposition 209

amended the California Constitution to prohibit public institutions from discriminating on the basis of race, sex, or ethnicity (California Affirmative Action, Proposition 209, 1996).

Table 3

*The research site Freshmen Retention and Graduation Rates of African-American Males First Time Freshmen Starting Fall 2009*



### **Instrumentation**

Recruiting African-American participants at the research site begins by contacting the gatekeeper of the African Student Center. The gatekeeper was asked to provide a printout of contact information of self-identified African-American males who graduated in the Spring of 2016. This researcher emailed those students and they were asked if they would partake in the research. If they agreed, they were asked to complete a profile questionnaire and return it to the researcher along with the email confirmation of their participation. In a confirmation email to the participants, this researcher included the questions she would be asking during the face-to-face interview. The participants were informed of the Institutional Review Board's (Appendix

D) consent requirements and asked to acknowledge that they understood those requirements (Creswell, 2007).

The participants were selected for this study based on meeting the following criteria:

1. Self-identified African-American male who graduated in Spring of 2016,
2. Self-identified African-American male who worked part-time during his undergraduate years,
3. Traditional self-identified African-American male college student between 18 – 22 years old,
4. Traditional self-identified African-American male college student willing to share experiences openly regarding their persistence.

Before the initial interviews took place, each participant was contacted by phone to create a relationship of trust between the researcher and the participant.

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative methods provide a more distinctive approach to scholarly review than do quantitative methods. Qualitative methods depend on text and image data, have distinctive steps in data analysis, and draw on various designs (Creswell, 2007). In-depth interviews and observations are two principal forms of data collection that are beneficial for addressing research questions. The use of multiple data collection methods is critical in attaining an in-depth understanding of the study's phenomenon and is expected in qualitative methodology. Multiple data collection activities support use of data triangulation, which assists the researcher by allowing the comparison and contrast of data collected at different times and places (Merriam, 2009).



Thematic analysis functions as a valuable tool to clarify the process of social construction. In particular, thematic analyses of the data can trace how a particular phenomenon develops. Hence, the researcher emphasized learning the meaning that the participants held about the issue or challenge, not the meaning that the researcher brought to the research. In addition, the researcher reflected on how her role in the study and how her background, culture, and experiences shaped her interpretations. Combining these elements with thematic analysis of interviews helped to assess the contribution of part-time employment to persistence.

### **Interviews**

Interviews are often utilized in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009) and were the primary form of data collection in this study. An interview protocol was developed. The components of the interview protocol included (a) heading (date, place, interviewer, interviewee), (b) instructions for the interviewer to follow, so that standard procedures were used from one interview to another, (c) probe questions for four or five of the questions to ask for elaboration on what the interviewee said, (d) a final thank you statement to acknowledge the interviewees time, and (e) a log to keep record of documents collected for analysis (Creswell, 2014). According to deMarrais (2004), an interview is a “process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study” (p. 55). Merriam (2009) stated that the person-to-person encounter is the most common form of interview for obtaining meaningful information. The interview method was especially useful in this research study because it allowed for the participants to detail their experiences around how they persisted in higher education.

Interviews were conducted using the protocol in Appendix E. The interviews occurred in a place the student felt the most comfortable. One option was the Center for African Diaspora

Student Success. In this natural setting, the researcher collected data in the field at the site where participants felt most natural and free to open dialogue. In addition, the researcher was the key instrument. As a qualitative researcher, she accumulated the data through observing behavior, and interviewing participants. She did not rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers.

### **Field Notes**

According to Merriam (2009), written field notes can become data that support the emergence of research findings. Aside from capturing how participants made meaning of their persistence, the face-to-face interviews served as a means for recording field notes on the affective components displayed by each participant. This researcher also observed and notated how the participants engaged and communicated with the researcher during the interview. The notes were useful in that they assisted in presenting an in-depth picture of each participant and helped to understand how participants constructed their experiences around persisting in higher education.

### **Identification of Attributes**

Identification of variables is the method of defining the measurement of a phenomenon that is not directly measurable (Leggett, 2011). Defining the variables used in the study was completed to provide the reader with a detailed explanation of what was being studied, and how it was measured to increase the quality of the results. The variables used in this case study included part-time employment and higher education persistence. For the purpose of this study, part-time employment was measured by African-American male student working under 40 hours/week. Higher education persistence is identified by those same students who graduated with a Bachelor's degree.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

Because text and observation data were so dense and rich, not all of the information could be used. So, the data must be “winnowed” (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012), a process of focusing on some of the data and disregarding other parts of it. In qualitative research, the impact of this process is to aggregate data into five to seven themes (Creswell, 2013).

The data was hand coded, which was an arduous and time consuming process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks by writing a word representing a category (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Codes could fall into three categories: (a) codes on topics that readers would expect to find, based on past literature, (b) codes that are surprising and that were not anticipated at the beginning of the study, and (c) codes that are natural, and of conceptual interest to readers, The analysis of the qualitative data consisted of six steps: (a) organize and prepare the data for analysis, (b) review all of the data including field notes, (c) start coding the data, (d) use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis, (e) advance how the description and themes will be presented in the qualitative narrative, and (f) make an interpretation of the findings and results (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Joffe, 2011). Hence, data analysis in qualitative research is the process of making sense of the data (Merriam, 2009). Coding was beneficial because it permitted the researcher to make notations next to pieces of data that were pertinent to understanding the problem and answering research questions. Open coding was especially useful in the early stages of data analysis because it allowed the researcher to code everything related to the study. Merriam (2009) found that, in this form of coding, the researcher normally wrote down their interpretations of the data, in the participants' words, or concepts from the research literature. Ultimately, themes were established by reviewing all the relevant information.

## **Thematic Analysis**

This study employed thematic analysis within the qualitative research frame. As a form of research methodology, thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006); it minimally organizes and describes the data set in rich detail. However, frequently it goes further than this and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide to the six phases of conducting thematic analysis are:

1. Become familiar with the data
2. Generate initial codes
3. Search for themes
4. Review the themes
5. Define and name themes
6. Produce the report

This research sought to assess the effects of African-American male students' part-time work and its influence on persistence to graduation. Qualitative approaches can be varied, multifaceted, and nuanced (Holloway & Todres, 2003). One type of qualitative method is thematic analysis (TA). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying and analyzing patterns of meaning in a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, thematic analysis often goes further and interprets numerous components of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998), it identifies which themes are important in the description of the phenomenon under study (Daly et al., 1997). The result of a thematic analysis should emphasize the most salient collections of meanings available in the dataset.

One of the benefits of thematic analysis is flexibility. Another approach that are fundamentally independent of theory and epistemology and can function across a range of approaches where thematic analysis resides. Thus, because of its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis offers a flexible and valuable tool that provides a rich and comprehensive, yet complex description of data.

Since thematic analysis refers to themes, the concept of a theme must be carefully considered. A theme suggests a specific pattern of meaning located in the data; it includes manifest content, which is something directly discernable across a series of interviews. Alternatively, it can include latent content, which indicates stigma implicitly via statements of maintaining social distance from a particular group. Specific criteria need to be predetermined regarding what can and cannot be coded within such themes; otherwise, this form of content is extremely subjective. Themes are thus patterns of explicit and implicit content, and thematic analyses tend to draw on both types of themes. Often a set of manifest themes will point to a more latent level of meaning. The interpretation of latent meanings that support sets of manifest themes necessitates interpretation (Joffe & Yardley, 2004).

Thus, similar to other qualitative methods, thematic analysis enables the gathering of knowledge of the meaning of the phenomenon under study and offers the necessary foundation for instituting valid models of human thinking, feeling, and behavior. However, thematic analysis is among the most systematic and transparent forms of such work, partially because it holds the prevalence of themes to be so essential. Consequently, thematic analysis not only forms the implicit basis of much other qualitative work, it also endeavors to offer a more systematic, transparent form of it.

### **Limitation of the Research Design**

The sample size of this study was relatively small. Thus, conclusions from this research were specific to the research setting and the individual situation and not intended to be generalized. However, findings and conclusions may be used as a referent for future programs and the possibilities of developing a deeper understanding of the issues. The findings may also be used to assist institutions of higher education in recruitment and retention of young African-American males.

### **Validation**

Qualitative validity means that the data is checked for accuracy by employing certain procedures, such as triangulation, member checking, and thick, rich description. Also, it indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different projects (Gibbs, 2007). A well trained researcher will check personal bias and expectations at the door. She is interested in learning as much candid information from the research participants as possible, and respectful neutrality is a must if the goal is valid qualitative research.

### **Credibility**

In qualitative research, credibility is concerned with the researcher's effort to provide evidence illustrating the plausibility of their findings. Merriam (2009) noted that trustworthiness could be addressed with a thorough and well-conceived research design. Three different strategies were considered to ensure the credibility of information in this study. These strategies included (a) triangulation, (b) member checking, and (c) the use of thick descriptions.

### **Dependability**

In qualitative research, the responsibility rested with the researcher to provide consistency in how data was gathered and to ensure appropriateness in how the data was treated

prior to analysis. Witt (1991) described the qualities a researcher brings to a study as dependability. Witt (1991) also contended that dependability in a qualitative study increased when a researcher offered evidence of the “appropriateness of the inquiry decisions made throughout the study” (p. 413). Dependability has also been called “auditability” (Creswell, 2005). In this definition, the emphasis was placed on the researcher leaving an audit trail of documents and artifacts of the research process and eventually of the decision-making procedures of the data collection and subsequent data analysis. Witt (1991) claimed that a researcher should leave an audit trail that consisted of “raw data (tape recordings, transcriptions, and notes from interviews and observations), products of data analysis and synthesis (all phases of category-development and themes), process notes (including decisions about research strategies and researcher reflections, questions, and insights), and materials relating to the intentions of the research drafts, such as notes and journals” (p. 413–414). For this study, a file was developed that organized all research drafts and created separate repositories for collected data and transcripts and an email or cloud drop box file for all feedback from the dissertation committee.

In addressing the issue of reliability, researchers employ techniques to show that, if the work were repeated, in the same context with the same methods and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained (Shenton, 2004). In addition to observing the activities at the research site’s African-American Diaspora Center, this researcher spoke with the director and the gatekeeper of the center to better understand the role of the center as well as the students who utilized the services provided by the center. With the help of the director and self-reported data, African-American males who graduated in Spring 2016 were identified. Using the list provided, this researcher verified those students who were employed during their tenure at the research

site. Once the 237 students were identified, they were sent an e-mail asking for participation in the study. Of the African-American male students who graduated in Spring 2016, 97 consented to participate. However, this researcher was only able to meet with those who still lived in the Davis community or who agreed to be interviewed over Skype. As a result, 35 African-American male students who worked part-time during their academic career were study participants. And the results of this case study were specific only to African-American males who graduated from a predominantly White 4-year public institution. However, the results of the study were not applicable to all students across all types of universities and colleges.

### **Triangulation**

Triangulation is the amalgamation of two or more data sources, investigators' input, methodological approaches, theoretical perspectives (Denzin, 1970; Kimchi, Polivka, & Stevenson, 1991) or analytical methods (Kimchi et al., 1991) within the same study. Yin (2012) further stated that, for case studies, data collection should involve a broad variety of techniques, not just a single technique such as observation. Surveys, archival analyses, and documentary searches can be invaluable in gathering case study evidence. Researchers utilizing triangulation use several methods and sources of data to verify information correlated to the phenomenon of interest. The strategy "involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Yin (1994) found data triangulation beneficial in that it allowed the researcher to present credible findings based on the convergence of multiple sources of information. These data sources yielded trustworthiness to qualitative studies because they "provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon" (Yin, 1994, p. 92). Data triangulation was employed in this study by drawing mostly on rich information from both observations and individual interviews (conversational and structured-question). The evidence



from these data sources converged, demonstrating how African-American men persisted and overcame obstacles in higher education.

### **Member Checks**

Member checking was used to enrich triangulation and to guarantee the credibility of the study's findings. According to Maxwell (2005), member checking is the "single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on" (p. 111). Fundamentally, this important strategy assisted researchers in validating their interpretations of how participants made meaning of their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Member checking permitted the solicitation of feedback from participants on the accuracy of collected data (Shenton, 2004; Merriam, 2009). After the interview data was transcribed, participants were sent their transcripts and asked to review them and offer preliminary feedback on comments and interpretations of the data. This was done to give participants a chance to provide their critical interpretation of the emerging findings making them directors of their narratives (Creswell, 2007).

### **Thick Descriptions**

Thick descriptions were utilized in this study to help comprehend the rich details of the case and to better understand the intricacies of the participant data (Dawson, 2010). Throughout the analysis, thick descriptions were used to portray the participants and to deliver findings from this study (Ponterotto, 2006). Thick descriptions were also used to characterize the males in this study because such descriptions aid the "reader's ability to visualize the sample including their relevant demographic and psychological characteristics" (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 546), without compromising anonymity. Thick descriptions were also used in reporting the findings to safeguard the adequacy and representation of participant voices. Illustrative quotes were taken

from the interviews to obtain an understanding of the cognitive and emotive states of the participants (Ponterotto, 2006).

### **Expected Findings**

Because African-American males' attrition rates at higher learning institutions are disproportionately higher in comparison to their White counterparts, this study was developed to find out if African-American male students' in-college work experiences have an impact on their persistence in college (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996). Thus, it is important for higher education institutions to understand and affect the academic performance and educational experiences of African-American males in order to help them persist to graduation. If colleges and universities designed supportive programs and services tailored to meet the educational needs of African-American males in and outside of the classroom, it could impact their engagement, which could then influence persistence and degree completion.

In addition, Perna (2005) found that students who worked were more confident and possessed better time-management skills than students who were not employed. In addition to offering a paycheck and some independence and satisfaction, a part-time job provided both training and experience. Working taught students about accountability and reinforced what they were learning in school. For instance, an on-campus research position might peak a student's interest in clinical research or provide important work experience that improved future career prospects. Thus, this researcher endeavored to find evidence that substantiated claims by other researchers like Furr & Elling, 2000; Lundberg, 2004; Orszag, Orszag, & Whitemore, 2001 that working 15 hours per week or less has a positive impact on student involvement and learning; it is possible students who worked fewer than 15 hours a week had higher GPA than other similar students, which provided an incentive to persist to graduation.

## **Ethical issues**

### **Conflict of Interest Assessment**

In a research environment, a conflict of interest occurs when a researcher's personal interests may conflict with his or her professional responsibilities to conduct honest, objective research (Creswell, 2007). Conflict of interest that goes unmanaged may lead to a loss of confidence in the integrity of the researcher, data, and research institution. Conflict of interest reduces the trust and confidence that people need to have in the pursuit of research. In this research, there were no financial gains for any parties.

### **Researcher's Position**

The researcher is considered an instrument of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This means that data are mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines. A good qualitative researcher asks probing questions, then listens, thinks, then asks more probing question to get into deeper levels of the conversation.

In this research study, this researcher was responsible party for data collection, analysis, and sharing. This researcher was the only investigator and did not express any opinion while conducting the research study. The researcher is employed by the research site but had no prior relationship to the African-American male students who composed the study. The role of the researcher was to provide a neutral position while learning what is happening (Patton, 1990). While reviewing the transcripts and member checking, the use of bracketing kept any of the researcher's own biases separated from the research study.

### **Ethical Issues in the Study**

There are numerous ethical challenges that have implications for qualitative research. These develop mainly from the evolving and unpredictable nature of the methodology involved. The ethical challenges that were relevant to qualitative research are informed consent procedures

(Ensign, 2003), the relationship between the researcher and the participant (Hofman, 2004), the ratio between risk and benefit (Cutcliffe & Ramcharan, 2002), and confidentiality (Polit & Beck, 2006). Ethical issues were addressed by guaranteeing anonymity, and identifying no names for the participants. Only pseudonyms were used as per the IRB approval for the doctoral study. Creswell (1998) suggested safeguarding ethical efforts such as (a) anonymity, (b) disclosing or failing to disclose the purpose of research, (c) how to treat information shared “off the record” (p. 134), and (d) deciding whether the researcher’s experiences should be shared. Ethical issues were addressed by providing the consent forms after careful explanation of the research study process. The explanation included the following:

1. Purpose of the study.
2. Name of person conducting the research.
3. Research to be conducted under the auspices of the research site.
4. Researcher’s contact information.
5. Information regarding the participants’ right to discontinue participation.

The informed consent form served as protection of human subject rights from any physical or psychological harm. All facts were revealed prior to the beginning of the study. All data was maintained solely by the researcher and kept in a locked and password protected computer in the researcher’s possession for five years from the date of publication of the research study.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

Chapter 3 was a summary of the research approach and the objectives that guided this study. Thirty-five African-American male participants who graduated from the research site during Spring 2016 were selected for this study. The methods, such as following the interview

protocol and allowing the participants to freely express themselves, with probing questions when necessary, used were non-biased in accurately presenting the individual stories of the participants regarding part-time employment to determine if it was a factor influencing African-American male students to persist and then graduate. Data was collected by interviewing, recording, transcribing, and coding participant responses from a series of interview questions.

Triangulation and member checking of interview transcripts increased the trustworthiness of this research study.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine the effects of African-American male college students' part-time work on persistence. A better understanding of this phenomenon would allow administrators and educators to become more informed on how African-American men earn their bachelor's degree. A qualitative collective case study is the methodological approach used to conduct the research. A case study approach was used, as it is "an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon set within its real-world context" (Yin, 2009, p. 18). The case study method allows the researcher to better comprehend the context of the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2009).

Data is analyzed using Creswell's (2013) data analysis spiral. Through this process, the researcher conducted numerous read overs of the interview transcripts and the field notes taken from the direct observations. In vivo coding allows for thematic similarities that are used to unearth patterns within the participants' responses. The results of the data analysis of the interview questions and the field notes taken from observations are the foundation for answering the research question and sub question.

### **Description of the Sample**

Pseudonyms were used in the study to safeguard the identities of the participants. The participants were enrolled in at least six units while they were in school. While 34 of the participants were employed to some extent while in school, one man worked full-time. In addition, three men do not have a mother in their lives, ten of the participants' mothers have a high school diploma, nine of the mothers have some college, seven of the mothers earned a bachelor's degree, three have a Master's degree, and one has a doctorate. The educational

background of the fathers of the men in the study are as follows: seven participants did not have fathers who are present, one father does not have a high school diploma, four of the fathers have some college, eight of the fathers earned a bachelor's degree, four serve in the military, three have a Master's degree, one has a law degree, one has a doctorate, and six men made no mention of a father. Some of the participants specified they were the first in their families to enroll in a baccalaureate degree program. Some participants also communicated graduate school aspirations and reported varying career goals. Below are brief participant summaries that relate to the information above.

### **Research Methodology and Analysis**

This study employed a case study research, as it is “an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon set within its real-world context” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). The case study method allows for better comprehension of the context of the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2009). Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggested that, because opinions, feelings, views, standards, and assumptive worlds are interconnected, the case study must seek to find deeper perspectives that could be captured through interactions. Context matters in understanding the phenomenon under exploration, interviewed African-American male students about their experiences while enrolled at the research site. Using semi-structured interview questions allows for an opportunity to probe into the case under study through the lens of each participant. Case studies have been used to organize a wide range of information and then used to analyze the contents by seeking patterns and themes. Analysis of this research was guided by inductive reasoning and relationships and themes, which resulted in a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study.

Throughout this qualitative case study, data was amassed from semi-structured interviews and direct observations that responded to the study's research questions. Creswell's (2013) data analysis spiral consists of organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the data, reducing the data into themes by coding and condensing the codes, and forming an interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2013). In Vivo codes are used to present an accurate reflection of the participants' replies to the interview questions (Creswell, 2013, p. 185). Data was read through several times and organized into themes.

Triangulation, which is used to support evidence from diverse sources, was conducted in the form of reviews of verbatim transcripts and field notes of observations. This usually is followed by member checks for correctness. Data analysis includes making sense of the data gathered while conducting fieldwork for the research study. Triangulation is instrumental in the trustworthiness of the research findings. The primary focus of the data analysis is to successfully answer the research questions. Thus, interview transcripts, field notes, and observations are studied and scrutinized. An inductive approach is used to evaluate the data in search of repeated patterns and common themes (Creswell, 2013).

### **Summary of the Findings**

During the analysis of the in-depth, semi-structured interviews and direct observations, themes and patterns began to emerge. In the analysis of the interview data, some of the themes overlapped, but, as data was further examined and coded, four major themes became evident. The themes were job satisfaction, relationships with parents, support systems, and a sense of motivation. These four themes represent the thoughts and perceptions of the graduated participants as they responded to the interview questions and produced the findings for this research study.



## **Presentation of the Data and Results**

### **Job Satisfaction.**

Supervisors exert a considerable influence on students' attitudes and the way students approach their work. A supervisor who adopts a directive role may produce skillful employees who lack initiative and creativity (Harnett & Katz, 1977). In contrast, a supervisor's lack of interest and involvement can result in student employees floundering and who are less engaged. Thus, it is not surprising when the participants spoke of their supervisors who made the work experience memorable and rewarding, and the job itself was merely a conduit to those supervisors.

Sterling is extremely satisfied with his supervisor. He is particularly appreciative of the time his supervisor spent with him. Sterling stated:

He was more than generous with his time, offering advice outside of University hours.

Also, at all times, my supervisor had supported and encouraged me in my work. He managed to get me out of my depression and helped me see things in the right perspective. He was supportive. He is interested...is always trying to build up my confidence.

Sterling beamed with excitement when speaking of his supervisor, who he called his mentor. Having a mentor was seen as a powerful advantage, whereas, in previous positions, the lack of a mentor left him feeling unmotivated.

Grayson appreciates the feedback he got from his supervisor, both formally and informally. Formally, he received a performance review after three months of being on the job, then again at 6 months. Informally, he received feedback on "almost" a daily basis, which "helped me develop a relationship with my supervisor." In addition, in formal feedback,

Grayson's supervisor was very specific, gave examples, and offered clear goals and expectations.

Grayson stated,

Specific examples helped me learn what I did wrong and what I did right; it made me want to work harder to get the wrong right. Moreover, by approaching me with sensitivity and taking on a helping, rather than corrective role, she helped me prioritize my work.

Furthermore, his supervisor gave Grayson feedback in private, when there was sufficient time and opportunity for clarification and discussion and with consideration for his feelings.

Grayson also learned from his supervisor, "A college degree is not just about getting a job or career. The benefits touch all parts of life: intellectual, social, sporting, personal, artistic, ethical, and so much more." Grayson understood that having an education, job specific knowledge, and transferable skills are necessary for college graduates to achieve success. He went on to say

That knowledge was reassuring and has helped me see how fortunate I was to have my student job. What I learned on the job has allowed me to learn how to react in stressful situations and how to deal with diverse populations. My student job gave me an advantage over my peers since I learned from my mistakes so I can fix them early on, before starting my career.

Grayson also smiled broadly when recounting his interactions with his supervisor. He also nodded with understanding and appreciation when speaking of the feedback he received from his supervisor. For Grayson, having a mentor equaled "access to information" and "access to information," equaled success.

Wilson also spoke about feedback and stated “getting feedback regarding my finished work was very important.” However, getting “prompt feedback was particularly important when I was first learning how to do a task since giving quick corrections when a task is still fresh is the best way to ensure I remembered how to complete it correctly.” He talked about use of positive feedback, stating,

Positive feedback, in particular, was also good for morale and can encourage student employees to be more productive and not hesitant to take the initiative. Therefore, my supervisor, who made a point of providing prompt feedback, whether that consists of constructive criticism or praise, was invaluable in developing me for my future jobs.

Patrick and Arnold spoke of informal learning experiences their supervisors made available to them. Their supervisors brought them to workshops and seminars as well as engaged them in conversations and activities that helped them grow as employees. They went on to distinguish this learning as being different from their formal classroom learning because these activities are often unstructured. Patrick and Arnold also spoke of informal learning opportunities that made them better and that enhanced their career development.

Patrick and Arnold further reminisced with appreciation when talking about their supervisors. They believed that the presence of an African-American male supervisor demonstrated that African-American men could achieve success.

John, who worked at the school library, said that his supervisor was his “sounding board.” John was able to “bounce things off of him, and he helped me focus my thinking and direction in life.” For John, the quality of the relationship was perceived to be more important than the actual quantity of the interaction. Additionally, John elaborated on the qualities of his supervisor:

These qualities were essential to my work experience. He provided insight into what worked and what did not. He was enthusiastic about his profession and had a positive outlook about his career choice. He had a sense of humor, and he had the ability to articulate and address sensitive issues. He certainly had the capacity to be both a good questioner and a good listener.

Other qualities of John's supervisor included setting high standards and expectations, the willingness to expend time and effort to provide relevant mentorship, a belief in his employees, open minded about what it takes to be successful, and he appreciated and welcomed diversity.

Michael and 10 other participants note that they had some opportunity to be mentored or they at least had supportive colleagues in their development. The majority of the participants are able to share experiences in which having a supervisor as a mentor influenced their career development. The mentors provide the student employees with tips on career growth and introduced them to other professionals. These men appreciated the role that their supervisors played in their development.

Reynaldo is an example of how mentoring influenced his career development; it started when he was a tutor, and his supervisor encouraged him to go into education. Reynaldo shared his experiences with a mentor with whom he attributes his success.

My mentor approached me and encouraged me to go into the MAT program; it was a program designed to get more African-American males into educational leadership at the research site. She had some associations there and asked me to consider it and had me meet some of the professors. I changed from a counseling major to a leadership major based on the referral from my mentor. She saw in me characteristics that would make me a good leader. She did more than just say 'I think you should do it.' She provided

support and mentoring through the process. I still stay in touch with her, and she still mentors me. I am where I am because of her.

Scott stated, “The role of the supervisor is vital to the success of any student worker.”

His supervisor served as a role model for the development of his good work habits, such as punctuality, dependability, cooperation, honesty, and efficiency. His supervisor provided the student employees:

With adequate guidance, training, and support. He was responsible for the work that the student employees did, many of whom had a great deal of potential but very little work experience. The patience and support he gave helped me and them developed that potential to become valuable assets to the department.

Scott further understands that it may be difficult to establish a formal training program for student employees as there are such high turnovers, but good personnel practices require that every student worker be oriented to the organization of the specific workplace and be trained to perform necessary tasks.

Timothy stated the supervisor who had the most impact on him was the one who terminated him from his lifeguard position. He went on to say,

Though I did not welcome it at the time, my supervisor presented me several insights into the role of supervisors. She offered clear communication at the beginning of my employment tenure, describing her expectations. When my performance did not meet those expectations, we reexamined the expectations. She clarified the result of my behavior on my colleagues; and, when my tardiness did not change, I was fired. During this conversation, she made an effort to sympathize with the personal struggles I was having. She informed me that I would no longer have a job and why. Even when I

showed signs of anguish during the conversation, she did not abandon her decision to end my service. At the time, she exhibited concern for my well being by offering me information about campus resources.

Additionally, Skinner conveyed, “My supervisor told me that a supervisor should work with his supervisees to understand the supervisees’ career goals and then provide opportunities to support those goals.” He elaborated, “He also exposed me to the importance of being engaged in professional associations. His mentoring was crucial to my developing confidence, as well as to develop skills in public speaking.” Skinner truly feels that his supervisor mentored him and developed him into the person he is today.

Johnson also spoke of mentoring from his supervisor, who helped guide him through his work experience.

She encouraged me to participate in events that may not normally be open to student employees, such as certain staff meetings, or other work related events even though some of the events were not directly tied to my specific job duties. But being a part of the meetings helped me see the bigger picture of the organization.

For Johnson, this mentoring relationship is most valuable; it gave him the opportunity to reflect on his experience in a supportive, educational atmosphere. His mentor also passed on a wealth of experience, knowledge, a fresh perspective, and new ways of thinking.

Kenton spoke about power and supervision. He told me that his supervisor taught him about the different kinds of power: *power over*, *power to*, *power of*, and *power with* (Follett, 1924). Kenton went on

He [His supervisor] clarified that *power of* is a conferred power, as in power of attorney, and that *power to* is a power that I give to someone. *Power over* describes a power

relationship that is characterized by dominance. What is ideal is to have *power with* a relationship between supervisors and supervisees. He clarified that this is a relational kind of power, the kind of relationship where students are colleagues.

This dialogue about power helped me think about the type of relationship I would like to have with my future bosses. I want to have a supervisory relationship that includes mentoring and empowerment, as I know being empowered and mentored will increase my job satisfaction and success.

Where Kenton's supervisor taught him about power, Wesley's supervisor taught him how to navigate differences.

My supervisor has held me responsible for exploring difference and working with other students, staff, and faculty who are different from me, employing the awareness, knowledge, and skills modeled. Multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills are integral to my achievement. My supervisor has been an important mentor for exploring my obligation to incorporate multiculturalism into the workplace.

To navigate the differences, Wesley learned, "I must be compassionate of other students' scholastic and emotional desires, hold the student to high expectations, and are mindful of the intricacies of identity development."

When asked about David's part-time job, he said the job was all right, but it is his supervisor who made the lasting impact.

My job gave me an edge over my peers, but it was my supervisor who taught me the valuable lessons of culpability, professionalism, and time management. The classroom to work transition was easier for me as I am used to the strains and stresses of holding a job. Additionally, I had the edge over my peers since I learned how to interact with staff

members, and I had a better understanding of the characteristics that make a good employee.

On the other hand, Jackson expressed that he was lucky to have the boss he did.

The autonomy and freedom I was given to do my job boosted my passion, eagerness, and success. My manager-mentor made sure my desires were supported by organizational direction, gave me some high-level parameters, resources, and introductions to make it happen. He removed impediments, taught me how to handle problems, afforded opportunities, and took the blame while giving me the credit.

Miller spoke about his manager, who taught him to be specific because “one of the most anxiety-inducing things in the world is going into a job without knowing exactly what you're supposed to be doing.” A specific manager will, “Lay out the goals they want a student employee to achieve, both in the long run and short-term.” As a matter of fact, “My supervisor instructed me to create my own goals, in conjunction with her wishes, so that I would have direction and more proficiently achieve what was required.” Miller believes that offering clear and consistent leadership is the most important action a supervisor can take to produce an effective and content workplace.

Miller also spoke of his supervisor's counsel to stay away from office politics.

I think the only thing worse than what I said earlier is going into a job and instantaneously getting bombarded with office politics. Nobody appreciates working in such an uncomfortable and emotionally charged setting, and students who are just getting their first taste of the working world particularly don't want to have to deal with established office resentments or unpredictable bosses.



What is important to Shepard, in his student job, is that he has a supervisor who is respectful of his time (and taught him to be respectful of others' time) as he (Shepard) is a father, a provider, and a full-time student.

College students frequently have hectic academic schedules that they can only somewhat control. Sometimes specific classes are only available at certain times so having a boss that gets that and works with that time frame is very important to me. If my manager is constantly keeping me late or demanding too much of my time for work, then there's a problem. Respecting my time also involves making some allowances for the amount of time it takes to fulfill tasks. I get that while my boss doesn't need to grant me an exorbitant amount of time compared to normal, he should understand that my lack of experience. Not to mention that it will initially take longer to accomplish some tasks than a more experienced employee. Understanding managers can help ease this burden by providing clear directions and encouraging questions.

While 30 participants indicated and happily recalled that it was their supervisor, not the job, who made the difference in their lives, there are five who do not share this sentiment. Jenkins stated his boss was a "ghost." The office was just a pit stop in between his personal errands and lunch meetings. "He never came around long enough to have impromptu chats, let alone offer regular performance feedback." Jefferson stated he had a "cool" boss. "He was more a friend than a leader. Having solid rapport with staff is admirable, but dedicating Google Hangout conversations to the particulars of his latest breakup was more information than I needed to know. He fixated so much on the desire to be a peer that he lost sight of his responsibilities as a supervisor." Chase calls his supervisor the "unfiltered friend." His supervisor "had no understanding of the line that separated suitable behavior from the suggestive

kind. My manager threatened a co-worker for making an honest mistake, as well as made politically inappropriate jokes in the pre-meeting small talk.” Anton had a boss who lied, stating “A boss who fabricates lies is deceitful, which is not a good for a productive relationship. My boss became so impervious to her lies that she convinced herself that the lies were true. Needless to say, these four students’ jobs did not contribute to their persistence. They also did not stay in their positions for long. They found themselves looking for other jobs, and eventually found the “right” fit.

### **Relationship with Parents**

According to Isaac, from the time he was in elementary school, his parents had communicated to him the importance of attending college. He specified that having the choice to focus on college presented an opportunity that many people had not been given. Isaac indicated that it was challenging to be prosperous without a college diploma because “you have to work a lot harder if you don’t have a degree to achieve those same goals.”

Isaac further specified that he has a good relationship with his parents. He credited them with instilling in him a strong work ethic.

My parents are from Nigeria; both of them were born and raised there. They told me that immigrants are 20% or 30% more likely to be successful and be millionaires compared to people who are actually from the United States. I think it had a lot to do with their work ethics. My parents are kind of traditional with work ethic. You got to get the job done, and you got to be hardworking. They instilled that in me.

Samuel remarked, “College was never really an option for me, it was an expectation.” Both of his parents and his grandparents attended college, so college was a necessity. He

remembered talking to his mother about this subject and remarked, “I’m a fourth-generation college student, which I know is tremendously rare. I feel very fortunate to be able to say that.”

Samuel describes a close relationship with both of his parents, with whom he conversed every day. He stated that, when he was younger, he had been very close to his mother. When he became a teenager, he became closer to his father. He stated that, even now, “many of my friends have seen the way we interact, and they say that my dad and I are more like big brother and little brother versus father and son.” Samuel also said that his father is very inspiring. He recalled, with fondness, that his father told him that he wanted Samuel to be more prosperous than he had been. He also encouraged Samuel to think about graduate school and law school, wanting him to pursue all options. Samuel also has a close relationship with his mother and maternal grandmother, both of whom are teachers. He remembers spending major holidays and time in the summer with his grandmother when he was younger. She helped him learn how to read and write before going to grade school. Samuel refers to her as his “second mother.”

Growing up, Jamal wanted to be a lawyer because he had been exposed to the world of law through his mother's work. This is one of his main reasons for wanting to go to college. Jamal credits his mother for motivating him to attend college. He describes a very close relationship with his mother, with whom he talks with every day. He lovingly describes her as an “incredible woman, very strong.”

Arnold emphasized that he wanted to go to college to improve his life so that he could provide for his family, which includes his immediate family, his mother, and son. He stresses that, because he is the only male in the family, he feels a responsibility to care for his family and would like to be able to give them whatever they want out of life. He stated that this goal is his mantra. “Until I reach that goal of financial freedom to give them whatever they want, then my

journey is not complete.” He disclosed that his mother does not expect him to accomplish the goal, remarking, “This is my goal, to be financially successful and be able to give her whatever she wants.”

Arnold acknowledged his mother as his motivator since she raised him. He stated that his father, who is “not the best influence” in his life, is not the man he is supposed to be and, as a result, has negatively impacted Arnold's life. Arnold reports, bitterly, that his father left his mother and him when he was 4 years old.

Jorden acknowledged, “As far as me going to college, I guess I had my mother’s parents push me as well. They are the ones who always brought it up to me. I guess that is where my mother got it.” Although Jorden’s parents divorced when he was 7, he feels that both parents had raised him and had helped to support him equally. However, he stated that his mother had pushed him to complete admissions applications and scholarship applications.

She'd reminded me, and she'd make sure I'd fill them out, and I remember I missed a couple of deadlines and she was not pleased with me. She also made sure I got my Eagle Scout so I could include that on my application. I know it sounds bad, but she was trying to fill in my application.

Jorden attributed a good portion of his success to his mother. He recognizes her for ensuring that he and his sister are exposed to many facets of life. He stated, “While there was an obligation to go to school, she also made sure that we stayed involved in extracurricular activities and were well rounded.” She took Jorden and his sister to museums, she enrolled them in Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and she made sure that they networked on all levels in and out of school. Though his whole family (mother, father, grandparents) serves as his support system, he tenderly

credits his mother as the driving force behind most of the activities in which he participated that inevitably led to him entering college.

Miller also credits his parents in his path to college. Miller readily admitted that he is closer to his mother. “My mom is a little more open.” Though he describes both of his parents as strict and religious; his mother is more liberal where his father is conservative.

If it weren't for my parents being there and making me do things and constantly reinforcing me telling me to do this and do that, even though I hated it, I wouldn't have gone to college. If it weren't for my teachers who taught me the materials that I would need to do well in my tests, where would I be? I would be nowhere. So, it would be my parents and teachers. Oh yeah, and God, of course.

My parents are a clash of both worlds. I get the best of both worlds. My mom told me if I want to sing in the choir, sing in the choir. If I want to play football, play football. I did both! My dad always said, “Keep your head in the books because the easiest way to keep something from the Black man is to put it in a book.” My dad always told me to concentrate on my studies. My mom said, “Concentrate on your studies but still have fun and be exposed to other activities.”

Scott claims that his father did not play an integral role in his life, nor did he have anything to do with Scott's success. His aunt and uncle, who he affectionately referred to as his “real parents,” raised him.

I stayed with my aunt and uncle; they were whom I called mom and dad. I didn't know my birth parents. My mom died when I was in ninth grade; it was a really strange relationship because she had other children, so we didn't talk. My father doesn't add any value to my life. I don't even know where he is.

Scott's parents, who sacrificed themselves, played a significant part in his academic accomplishments and his road to college. He described his aunt and uncle as providers to the point that they gave up much for themselves to ensure that he was successful.

The only thing my father could have added was something of a monetary value because it was hard. My aunt and uncle have two children of their own that they just put through college. Then a few years later I had to go through college.

Scott's brother and sister are 11 and 13 years older than him. Due to the age difference, he is able to go to them for assistance when his parents could not provide it.

They provided for me because my aunt and uncle are in their 50s, getting ready to be in their 60s. They couldn't do things that I needed them to do, like going to games. So, it was good having older cousins to fill in that role.

### **Support Systems**

In addition to having supportive parents, these men also have strong support systems. Wilson indicates that his family has been a system of support and that his father has served as a significant role model for most of his life. In addition, he explicitly mentions the influence of his older sister, whom he tenderly calls "mummy junior" because "she has been a sister, but more like a parental kind of figure." He recalls her looking after him and talking to him like a friend and a parent. He also spoke of his brother, 10 years older than he. His brother attended Harvard but dropped out after a year. Wilson communicated about how fruitful his brother has been but also stated how much harder it has been for him because he does not have a college degree. Wilson conveys that he can avoid that challenge "by simply getting an education." His brother has helped him to understand the significance and value of a college education. Wilson understands the importance of relationships with his family. Thus, he seeks out mentors at the

research site. He explicitly mentions one mentor who had introduced him to graphic design, which he is now contemplating because of the variety and opportunities that it offers. For Wilson, his family and mentors have played a vital part of his college experience.

When asked about the values or knowledge family members instilled in Wesley regarding enrolling and being successful in college, he mentions his sister. “She encourages me on a daily basis.” He states that she serves as a cheerleader because she recently graduated and is admitted into a competitive graduate program. Wesley reveals that he trusts his sister's wisdom because “she has been there and done that, so she can help me.”

Samuel spoke of his support system while in high school. “I was surrounded by people who wanted and expected me to continue to college and who also knew that high school wasn’t the last step in our journey; it was a step in the process,” Samuel speaks reverently of his “amazing teachers and counselors who are very encouraging and who wanted me to prosper.”

Dwayne describes many types of support: family, friends, teachers, counselors, and peers. He fondly talks about the support provided by his grandmother. He declares that he “got a head start” because of the time he spent with her during the summers learning how to read. He further reveals that he surrounded himself with people in high school who were determined to go to college. He said that this group of friends, teachers, and counselors offered support because they believe that “high school was just the beginning.” Dwayne reiterated that he loves his family and friends and believes that everything about him is a reflection of them. When asked about what inspires him, Dwayne replied that both his family and representing African-American males serve as motivators.

My motivation is undeniably my family. I want to make them proud. I make sure everything I do mirror the morals that they have instilled in me. Also, I think being a

Black male is motivation because there aren't very many of us. So, everything that we do is kind of under a magnifying glass, which keeps us determined to keep going and keep breaking the stereotypes.

When asked about support systems, Kenton smiles broadly, and mentions that two of his cousins have always been there while he was growing up. Both are about 15 years older than he and cared for him when he was younger. Now, both are lawyers in New York. He fondly recalls spending time with them and being exposed to new things: new food, different cultures, Roth IRAs, and so forth. "They had an incredible impact on me. Not only in going to college but to make myself more knowledgeable in finances. I had never heard of a Roth IRA. They positively influenced me."

Anton proclaimed that his aunt and his brothers served as his support system.

My amazing aunt and my brothers were always around. I have two brothers, there are no girls, and we were always in the back yard, always playing sports, always singing or whatever, always together. They were my constant companions, that is just how we were, no one messed with us because we were always together. My aunt took care of us; she was like my sister. I didn't have a sister but, when I was in elementary school, she was in high school, so she knew what we wanted for Christmas. She knew what we liked eating. She could identify with us. Even now she'll call me, ask me if I'm all right. She has always been there; she's like a second mom.

Johnson emphasizes that, although his father is not always there to help raise him, his mother had her family and his father's family to look to for support. He indicates that his family plays an important part in his academic success. He recognizes and credits his extended family (grandparents, aunts, and uncles) for his early academic successes.



I have a lot of great uncles and aunts who have done well in their lives. There are many lawyers in my family, along with a lot of business professionals. That is why I want to do great for my family.

Shepard also affirms that his whole family (mother, father, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.), all of whom are college educated, serves as his support system. Though he credits his mother as the driving force behind most of the activities in which he participated that inevitably led to him entering college.

Patrick comments on the encouragement of a faculty member to his academic success. Professor Adams supports him by showing concern, not only for his academic success but also for his well-being. He shows compassion for Patrick and tries to help him maximize his potential. Patrick also spoke about the significance of developing relationships with faculty by taking the initiative to interact with them during their office hours. He stresses that these relationships allow his professors to see that he is diligent about his studies and serious about succeeding academically.

Jorden also explain that his African-American professors maximized his potential because they recognized that he is capable of excelling academically.

Most of them were Black, which I appreciated because what I know now is that the professors who were not Black frequently water things down. I believed that the Black professors were usually tougher because they knew that I had potential and they'd push me, which will help me in the long run.

Anthony comments on a faculty's care and concern for his welfare and how this extended beyond academic issues. He also explains that faculty members were there for him and took extra time to make sure he understood the information presented in class:

Yeah, the faculty was great. I always told myself, “[If I had] gone to another university, would I have gotten this experience?” I heard people say bad things about the [university] to me, that the professors here don’t care about you. But that wasn’t my experience.

Marley underscored how a particular faculty member demonstrated empathy based on her own life experiences and developed a supportive relationship with him:

We had an assignment-we had to write an essay reflecting on something that happened in our past. I don't remember what I wrote about, but the professor came to me after class and said, ‘Oh, you know I went through the same thing. If you have any problems, you can always call me.’ She gave me her phone number and email address. I was able to call her if I had problems with homework, or if I needed help with an assignment.

Reynaldo believes that faculty went beyond their professional duty to form supportive relationships with him and other students. “They created a close-knit community in which students felt a part of the institutional fabric of the campus. They were compassionate, and used empathy to foster a better relationship with the students, helping us to personally identify with them.” Furthermore, he conveyed that African-American professors capitalize on his potential because they knew he possessed the ability, aspiration, and enthusiasm to succeed.

Conversely, Adam mentions that administrators are another important element of the support system. The administrators he encountered are helpful, accessible, and exhibited a caring attitude about his accomplishments. Adam met staff that are kind and liberal with their time. He got to know them on a first name basis because “they demonstrated care that extended past their job description.” A few of these administrators also serve as role models and mentors; they embody the richness of social capital at this school.

In addition to faculty and administration, Crawford cheerfully described that his peer group significantly influences his academic accomplishments. Crawford specified he endeavors to create a community of peers who are driven, persistent and works industriously toward their educational ambitions. He resolutely believes that his peers fuel his desire and drive to become academically successful:

Most of my friends...they had ambitions, drive, and passion. I endeavored to keep people like that close to me. They changed me because I emulated them. They made me more focused.

He elaborated,

If I didn't surround myself with people who were hardworking, scholarly, and motivated, the years in college would have been tough because I think I feed off my friends. Who you choose as friends is very important. If I didn't have those friends, it would have been difficult to be prosperous as we were all going to graduate and saw ourselves as successful.

Skinner remarked on the positive impact peers had on his academic accomplishment.

Specifically, he described that peer pressure increases his motivation and aspiration to perform well:

If you have friends pressuring you to do well, you don't have a choice but to do well if you want to stay with that group. Peer pressure might sound elementary, but it's true; I don't care how old you get, it still happens. I was ultimately compelled to do well by others.

Christopher agreed that a person's social network has personal implications of success.

"People that you surround yourself with, they could make you do things you don't want to do.

Because of that, you also have to be with people who have the same goals and drive as you.” He also commented on how his peers encourage and motivate him to flourish academically.

Conversely, there are times when he has to act as a figure of authority to his peers to ensure that they did not lose their focus. Specifically, he stated,

One of my good friends had a 1.0 GPA. As his friend, I had to help him by talking with him, encouraging him, and making sure he did his schoolwork. Even though he was my age, I still had to be the father figure and say, ‘Did you do your work? Do you have homework?’

Lewis also explained how one of his peers encourages him to persist: “I found two of my friends through the precollege program...Whenever we needed to be encouraged, we just encouraged each other.” He added, “Some of the buddies who I've formed friendships with are the ones who have challenged me.”

Finally, Michael favorably articulated how his peers became his support system. They kept him invigorated, and offered an outlet to mitigate stress, as well as help him focus on his goals. He noted:

Friends gave me another reason to stay in school. I didn't realize how important my friends were. Even though I have brothers and sisters, my friends were important because they were there to support me.

By establishing supportive relationships with others, who encourage perseverance and persistence toward the goal of graduation, support systems deliver a rich source of social capital. However, while not explicit, it is likely that without the interactions students have with their peers, their academic success would be hampered. These participants convey that their friends

encourage their persistence by demonstrating concern for their academic success, encouraging them to persist, and acting as authority figures.

### **Sense of Motivation**

Aside from their support systems, the participants in this study have a healthy sense of motivation to persevere in higher education. The data establishes that as a group, their reasons to persist are driven by their core beliefs and values they have for themselves as well as by ideas about impacting the life of others. Participants disclosed what drives them personally to be successful in college and to persist to graduation.

Jackson is self-driven and specifies that he has always done exceptionally well in school. He remembered that, throughout his education, he constantly took the initiative to do his homework. “I never came home and had my parents tell me to sit down to do my homework.” Jackson recognizes that he is studious but referred to his involvement outside of the classroom.

I have a lot of things that I do outside of school. To accomplish that I can't be lazy or try to study the night before a test. I have to push myself to make sure that I am planning out my time weekly and studying weeks in advance for a test. I maintain my academic success as well as my extracurricular participation through hard work.

Foster portrays himself as a social person who likes to have fun. He specified that he loves his family and friends and thinks that everything about him is a reflection of them. He also labeled himself as a type of “peace keeper.” He communicated that, in high school, he liked to socialize with various groups of people and did not belong to just one group. While Foster did not consider himself a leader, he has accepted leadership positions in the brotherhood organization on campus.

I'd say I'm a leader in the Brotherhood organization I was involved with. I was the personal development chair in my sophomore year and the liaison between the officers and the general membership body. I was also the social chair. I put together social activities for us to do as a group to foster friendships and get to know each other better and be a tighter knit unit, so we weren't just an organization, we were friends.

When asked about his motivation, Reynaldo stated that he is "extremely goal oriented" and that he has a "very thorough plan for the next 10 or 15 years." He revealed that one of his goals before coming to college was to ensure that he did not have to pay to attend school. He is very pleased that he obtained grants and scholarships. He also spoke of his goal of becoming a teacher. Last year, he applied to three programs and has been accepted by all three. He chose to attend the program at the research site.

Timothy describes himself as amiable, friendly, enthusiastic, and a leader. When asked what inspired him to graduate and strive to be successful, his response was

I guess the obligation I feel to myself, but even more so my family because I have three other siblings below me. I feel an obligation to do the right things because I know they're looking up to me. One of my worst fears has been doing something that my family wouldn't be proud of because a lot of them look up to me. So I try to live up to that and fulfill everything because I feel that obligation to my siblings to give them someone to look up to.

Jefferson's motivation to persist in higher education is related to not wanting to become a statistic. From his perspective, Jefferson defined what it means to be a statistic:

Whether it is a deadbeat father or a kid who drops out of high school because he wants to smoke his life away or join a gang. Or in high school or college, when a guy parties too

much, and he decides he doesn't want to finish school. He's failing, and he just wants to take the easy road.

Jefferson made clear his resolve for not falling prey to the social problems or offenses that plaque his community. He recognizes the personal consequences of not persevering in college, stating, "If I don't become a success, I'll become a statistic, and I refuse to become a statistic."

Jefferson articulated his commitment in this manner:

I've always stated that I would never drop out of college...and especially high school.

I've always felt that I was born with something that other people don't have. I am here for a purpose. And I try to serve that purpose. And that's been my driving force [to persist and earn a degree]...besides my family.

Jefferson's remark indicates a high degree of confidence for being successful and is foundational for him to reject becoming a statistic.

In response to what motivates him to be successful in college, Chase also emphatically stated, "I don't want to be another statistic." Jefferson and Chase have distinct life experiences; yet, they share similar ideologies about persisting and being successful in college. Chase stated

I don't want to be another guy that just comes to college and just gets a job. I want to come to college, do well, meet people, [and] network. I want to have a job that contributes to society. Rather than have a job that just makes money.

Jenkins' motivation to persist is directed by his long-term goal of becoming a Chief Financial Officer in corporate America. He wants to "get as far in business" as he can, and hopes that the connections he makes in graduate school would be foundational to this undertaking. Jenkins emanated confidence in his abilities to be prosperous in corporate America. The spirit of his conviction centers on his knack for linking persisting in college to having

flexibility in choosing a career. This is an important insight, given that many African-American college students fail to visualize this connection (Leppel, 2002).

Foster is also motivated to persist, specifically because of his desire to make a difference in the lives of African-American males. In his interview, he expressed concerns related to the negative experiences and portrayal of young African-American males in society and education. Despite the frustration he holds for the prevailing problems that plague many African-American males, Foster believes that persisting and earning a degree would equip him with the knowledge and skills to make a difference. This is what he said:

Me personally, I don't like the way African-American males are...young men are growing up, and are being raised in cities riddled with gangs. Especially in the schools and school system. So, one of my choices that I was trying to decide on is if I was going to go back into a high school and teach them for a while. I want to go back just to show 'you can make it.' Help try to guide them...[just like] how my teacher back in high school helped guide me.

Foster's interview suggested that his position and experience as an African-American male provide him a unique perspective on how to make a difference. He offered this brief perspective, given his familiarity with the seemingly endless problems that affect the African-American community:

I see that many [African-American] people who are not doing anything meaningful. And some of it is not their fault. Some just don't have the resources. They don't know how to get it [the resources to enhance their well-being] because they haven't seen it, and there isn't somebody trying to reach out to them.



The above commentary does little justice to demonstrate the passion that Foster has for influencing the lives of young African-American males. He believes that persevering in college and through the graduate school pipeline would give him the understanding and self-confidence to transform his passion into actions that make a difference and have a lasting impact on African-American males.

#### **Chapter 4 Summary**

The participant summations reveal the diverse backgrounds, age, family composition, and area of employment. In many ways, these participants are similar to each other. For example, all articulated during the interviews the significance of participating and increasing knowledge in post-secondary education. To varying degrees, these men communicated how their families expected them to graduate from college. In some cases, the men outperformed their parents by becoming the first in their families to receive a baccalaureate degree. Despite their expressed obstacles, these men persisted through the education pipeline. They are involved in numerous organizational and leadership opportunities, developed a meaningful relationship with diverse members of the community, and instituted high expectations for their own successes.

This section also summarizes the responses of the interviewees according to the themes that emerged from analysis of their overall responses: (a) job satisfaction, (b) relationship with parents, (c) support systems, (d) and a sense of motivation. For these men, for many of these men, it is their supervisor and coworkers, not the job, who helped them persevere to graduation. In addition, their parents (one or both) were a major factor in them going to college. Furthermore, their support systems help them see beyond the immediate, to aim for completion of their college degree. Lastly, their sense of motivation, in which they saw themselves beyond the environment in which they grew up in, helps them persist to graduation.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine the effects of African-American male college students' part-time work and its impact on persistence. Utilizing data from in-depth interviews from 35 participants, the study revealed how African-American men negotiated their way toward earning a bachelor's degree. Interviewing these participants and coding were valuable, resulting in themes that emerged.

This section documents the themes from the research study, each of which were analyzed relative to the specified research questions. By presenting these themes, this researcher set out to document the distinctive experiences of the participants in this study; thus offering an opportunity for others to appreciate how they persist in higher education. The focus during data collection was on permitting the participants to speak for themselves, and share directly their experiences concerning persistence. To sufficiently depict their perspectives, it is essential to draw on direct quotations from the interview transcripts, and to meticulously analyze and interpret the interactions during the interviews. These efforts permit the researcher to capture the meaning and intricacies of the data, which certainly worked to reinforce the research findings. The themes include job satisfaction, relationships with parents, support systems, and a sense of motivation. These four themes represent the thoughts and perceptions of the graduated students as they responded to the interview questions.

### **Summary of the Results**

The first section is a discussion of the findings that support the first research question, "How do African-American males perceive working part-time, while enrolled full-time, to have

an impact on their persistence?” From the interviews with the 35 participants, the theme job satisfaction emerged. Within the theme of job satisfaction, four sub themes also emerged.

This study found that supervisors, co-workers, recognition, and personal development are the primary contributing factors impacting job satisfaction. The supportive role of the supervisor and subsequent positive relationships with employees are emphasized.

Furthermore, effective communications in the workplace meets the intrinsic needs of employees. Effective communication is emphasized as an important factor related with the work environment. Numerous participants made reference to the importance of effective communication and the potential impact it has on the development of communal values amongst all employees. Communication among co-workers as well as the importance of communication with the supervisor is evident; it is clear that communication is not only reserved for colleagues on the same level in the organization, but it is expected of subordinates and student employees as well.

In addition to needing acknowledgement at work, personal development focuses on the experiences of being challenged at work and the opportunity to grow at work. It highlights specific motivational factors within the work environment. Personal development includes the significance of meaningful work and personal accomplishment, which helps with self-actualization. During the interviews, many participants also commented on their ability to assert themselves and to have self-confidence in their own skills. This resulted in self-efficacy in the lives of the participants at work.

### **Job satisfaction**

Job satisfaction describes how satisfied a person is with his job; it is a fairly contemporary term since, in previous centuries, the profession of that person’s parent frequently

determined the jobs for that particular person. There are a variety of factors that can influence a person's level of job satisfaction (Parvin & Kabir, 2011). Some of these factors include the level of pay and benefits, the perceived fairness of the promotion system within a company, the quality of the working conditions, leadership and social relationships, the job itself (the variety of tasks involved, the interest and challenge the job generates, and the clarity of the job description/requirements). This study shows that supervisors, co-workers, recognition, and personal development were the primary contributing factors impacting job satisfaction.

**Supervisors.** The supportive role of the supervisor and subsequent positive relationship with employees were emphasized during the interviews. Participants made positive remarks about the encouragement and guidance received from their supervisor. For instance, some participants regarded the supervisor as a role model or a guide in the workplace. One participant even referred to his supervisor as a father figure. Contrary to this, however, it was evident from the interviews that some participants did not experience such a positive working relationship. They highlighted some of the negative behaviors of their supervisor, and some even recommended alternative management practices.

Thus, it is clear that the knowledge and expertise of the supervisor are acknowledged and even appreciated. Though such an appreciation does not indicate a more personalized connection with the manager, it is apparent from conversations that a more personal relationship was appreciated and welcomed. This indicated that the supervisor is not necessarily regarded as an individual separated from co-workers by knowledge and expertise, but somebody who has the capacity to create opportunities for closer personal relationships to attain certain results in the office.

Many participants stress that, through the establishment of close interpersonal connections, their supervisors are afforded the opportunities to provide practical guidance on problems in the workplace, but also to use such a relationship to communicate organizational expectations in a less intimidating fashion to employees. Samuel shares that because his supervisor is aware of his developmental needs, and thus, steered him into a developmental path that aligned with the organizational mission and vision.

In addition, another related theme emerging from the interviews is the importance of communication within such a relationship with the supervisor. In order for the managers to be able to foster opportunities of leadership and to make recommendations for future development and growth, an open communication network between the two parties is believed to be essential.

Marley indicates,

The importance of communication in the office did not stop with my supervisor and me, but was also apparent in her relationship with other employees. Such abilities in my supervisor created the perception that all workers in the organization were essential irrespective of title, experience, or job description. The message that each worker was respected for his own unique contributions created a work environment of mutual respect and acceptance.

Christopher shared the same sentiment:

The importance of creating interpersonal relations with staff did contribute to a cohesive and productive work environment. I observed such behavioral traits from my supervisor and decided to implement it in my own relationship with employees. The only way of getting good results is to be always friendly with the people. I encourage them to talk to me if they need help.

However, from the interviews it is evident that some participants are cognizant of certain undesirable attributes in their supervisors. For example, Isaac experiences his supervisor as autocratic and reactive.

I tried as much as possible to be friendly because we were professionals. We had to act like professionals while we worked together, but he was an autocratic leader. He liked his views to dominate. He had no idea what he was doing. He waited for things to get done, and, if they didn't, he would panic, and, when he panicked the resultant email reflected the way he was thinking at that time.

It is evident from the excerpt that there is a lack of any close interpersonal relationship between Isaac and his supervisor. The reason for attempting a more civil connection with the supervisor is not of an inherent nature, but rather an expectation of professionalism in the workplace. Respect for the supervisor is also not apparent in the use of words such as “autocratic leader,” “dominate,” and “panic”.

Job satisfaction includes a respectful, reciprocal relationship between employee and supervisor. Many participants made mention of the importance of the interpersonal relationship with the supervisor. Guidance, encouragement, and help with certain tasks are also stated as examples of a valued supervisor. Such supportive leadership qualities contribute to perceptions of work satisfaction (Ahmad & Yekta, 2010). Criticism is also assigned to the supervisor. A few participants revealed behavioral traits they viewed as undesirable in the organization. This part of the theme is associated with Herzberg's (1959) hygiene factors where it is proposed that the occurrence of these variables could lead to dissatisfaction. Vicarious reinforcement related with the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986) can also explain the participants' negative reactions concerning their supervisors; it is contended that individuals observe behavior and will

evaluate it in terms of consequences, which will affect the likelihood of them copying such behavioral traits (Bandura, 1986).

**Co-workers.** A second theme that emerge from job satisfaction include the significance of co-workers. Closely connected was the importance placed on the purpose and role of communication within the workplace.

Wesley who believe in effective communication with his co-workers states:

Communication is not only a requirement for a professional individual, but also plays a role in the daily interactions between the other tutors, teachers, students, and me. Within any work setting it is normal that daily differences will happen, which needed to be dealt with. In order to prevent lasting negative impacts, it was expected of all of us to address such potential problems through communication.

Because of common communication values among employees, once open communication channels have been established, an environment characterized by shared values and trust is developed. Subsequently, when an environment of openness is the norm, the result will be the creation of a workspace where employees have the freedom and willingness to share with their superior. Thus, effective communication in the workplace met the intrinsic needs of employees. Effective communication is emphasized as an important factor related with the work environment. Numerous participants made reference to the importance of effective communication and the potential impact it has on the development of communal values among all employees.

The participants regarded communications in the workplace as important. An interesting link between communication among co-workers and communication with the supervisor is evident based on the interviews; it is clear that communication is not only reserved for

colleagues on the same level in the organization, but it is expected of subordinates and student employees as well. Such collective values will place employees abiding to it in the in-group in the organization (Ahmad & Yekta, 2010).

**Recognition.** The interviews made evident that all participants have a need to be accepted within their workplace. They spoke of a need for acknowledgement and appreciation of their own unique abilities and qualifications. Recognition is not described as focusing on a job well done, or the acknowledgement of successful completion of tasks, but rather a gratitude for the qualifications being brought to the workplace.

A rather complex predicament for participants is the fact that there are certain perceptions regarding their experience and skills. For example, Anthony grappled with the perceptions of his co-workers when he started his job. He is cognizant of possible perceptions regarding his competency as he stressed it several times during the interview, stating, “I am highly educated and had the ability to do the job well.”

The question can be asked then, “Why it is important for employees to receive acknowledgement for their skills in the workplace?” A probable suggestion, apart from the intrinsic value of such appreciation, is that people do want to fit in and be recognized within their workplace.

Participants are outspoken in their need to be acknowledged in the workplace. They made particular reference to their qualifications and are vocal in convincing others of their credentials and skills. Job qualities such as feedback and autonomy contribute to work motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Vroom’s (1964) Expectancy Theory explains the participants’ desire for recognition of their experiences. The theory explains that participants enter the work environment with specific expectations based on the value they place on the job



and their perception of them deserving the particular job. Indifference will occur if they do not experience an environment where others acknowledge their distinct contribution to the organization.

**Personal development.** In addition to needing acknowledgement at work, personal development includes activities that improve awareness and identity, develop talent and potential, build human capital and facilitate employability, enhance the quality of life and contribute to the realization of dreams and aspirations through being challenged at work; it highlights specific motivational factors within the work environment. Personal development includes the significance of meaningful work and personal accomplishment, which helps with self-actualization. During the interviews, many participants also commented on their ability to assert themselves and to have self-confidence in their own skills. This resulted in self-efficacy in the lives of the participants at work.

Many participants mentioned the need to be challenged within the work setting. They provided practical examples within their daily routine to demonstrate an intrinsic need to reach beyond the minimum expectations of the job description. For example, Samuel states, “At my last job, I was given a project and the expectations for it, but I knew that the minimum requirements were not going to get the job done correctly. I had to work weekends, but I did it how I knew it had to be done. That is how I define ‘going above and beyond’: doing what needs to be done and not just what was expected of me.” This produces a learning environment for students that go beyond the daily routine of lessons.

Closely related with the desire to be challenged is the need for individual growth and development within the workplace. Examples mentioned by participants reflect the daily tasks, but also have a higher dimension where upon references are made regarding personal growth on

an intrinsic level. Marley states, “While pay raises may encourage some employees to stick around, it is the high performing employees who remain in jobs that challenge them, utilize their knowledge, and provide meaning.” In another interview, Wilson explicitly mentions the relative unimportance of extrinsic rewards as opposed to the more intrinsic rewards.

A noteworthy link is discovered in the theme of recognition of competency. The participants openly spoke of the significance of being viewed as knowledgeable, even an expert to new student employees, in their work environment. Such feelings are closely connected with the need for growth and personal success, and could be seen as the final conclusive indication of being viewed as “good enough” for a particular job (Wart, 2017).

Participants made several comments regarding the importance of being challenged in the workplace and being successful in what they do. A feeling of achievement is associated with success and contributes to an awareness of being an expert in their job (Wart, 2017). Content theories such as the hierarchy of needs (1943), the achievement motivation theory (1953) and the two-factor theory (1966) all discuss the need for challenge, growth, and self-actualization. Thus, the need for self-actualization could be linked to the theme associated with recognition since participants endeavor to be the best and try to demonstrate their expertise and skills.

Though these were student positions, the males interviewed made mention to their capacity to take matters in their own hands and their perception that individuals are accountable for their own choices and actions. The desire for self-efficacy is correlated with the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986) where it is contended that a triage among the environment, behavior, and perceptions act as instigator of judgment of a persons’ own skills. In other words, self-efficacy is the ability of individuals to use their cognitions and emotions to motivate themselves and to achieve a specific goal (Bandura, 1986).

The theme of personal progress made mention of the need for self-actualization and self-efficacy. Sufficient evidence in the literature is found where it is proposed that progress and success contribute to perceptions of work satisfaction (Gunz & Heslin, 2005; Wrzesniewski, 2002; Reitman & Schneer, 2003).

Job satisfaction is important in that its absence frequently leads to laziness and reduced organizational commitment (Levinson, 1997; Moser, 1997). Therefore, the relationship between supervisor-coworker-employee and job satisfaction is extremely complex and involves many defining dynamics. It is maintained that a cordial relationship among supervisor, coworker, and employee leads to job satisfaction (Petersitzke, 2008). It is certain that an amiable supervisor-coworker-employee relationship shapes the employee's morale, which makes him feel affective about his job, particularly when his efforts are acknowledged and rewarded (Rizwan et al., 2013). This brings him satisfaction in his job. Thus, he endeavors to attain both organizational and personal goals (Sousa-Poza, 2000).

In addition, employee recognition also contributes to job satisfaction (Brun & Dugas, 2008; Long & Shields, 2010). Employee recognition is usually conceptualized as the assignment of personal non-monetary rewards to strengthen desired behaviors exhibited by an employee, after these behaviors have transpired (Long & Shields, 2010) as employees place a high value on personalized, specific, and instant social rewards. The implications here are profound. As employers continue to look for ways to meet the efficiency, motivation, and retention challenges of today's businesses, the added recognition of their human resources must be of primary importance (Luthans, 2000).

Student employees are not simply responding passively to the working environment and development opportunities that are presented, but they also seek out development opportunities

to participate in proactive behaviors to increase their knowledge and skills (Crant, 2000; Grant & Ashford, 2008). In today's multifaceted and ambiguous world, organizational success and persistence rely on proactivity. Thus, employers can profit from encouraging part-time employees to be more proactive and engage in personal development by creating a supportive environment where personal development is encouraged and supported (Kossek, Roberts, Fisher, & Dmarr, 1998).

Many of the participants in this study humbly recognized how meaningful their interactions with supervisors, co-workers, and peers were to their persistence at the research site. A few of the men spent time with African-American supervisors who were willing to support their persistence in college. These supervisors provided a sense of comfort and allowed the men to feel relaxed during the course of their formal and informal interactions.

### **Secondary Research Question**

The unanticipated findings arose when the secondary research question resulted in more information than the primary question. The sub question asked, "What other factors influenced African-American male students to persist through graduation?" These factors include parents and family, support systems, and a sense of motivation.

### **Parents and Family**

One of the characteristics that stand out with most of these men is that their parents and family were always involved while they were in college. Their parents, even single-family parents, had high expectations of their enrolling in and graduating from college. In addition, family members are a source of support and encouragement. During the conversations, the researcher found that the men in this study received encouragement from both close and extended family members. Skinner, for example, took gratification in knowing that his parents

are his greatest supporters. They set high expectations for his success, as well as continually reminded him that he “can do this [finish college].” Alternately, Arnold grew up in a single-parent household with a mother who had always supported his endeavors. She made no exception to this when he registered in college. She would frequently “check in” with him. While possibly overzealous, this “checking in” illustrated the role that Arnold’s mother played in advancing his college persistence. Her unrelenting interference tendencies coupled with Arnold’s ongoing commitment and determination did positively shape Arnold’s persistence and educational success.

The narratives provided by both Skinner and Arnold reveals the concern and regard both their parents had, and continued to have for their college success. Dwayne took a moment to share how his mother, from her own position of not completing college, subtly encouraged him to persist in higher education. He state,

She would always compare us to her. She would always say why she didn’t finish college. She would always tell us her story, and then tell us to follow in her footsteps, but go further.

This seemingly remorseful, yet hidden message from Dwayne’s mother epitomized the belief that many parents want more for their children than what they (parents) have. Based on Dwayne’s interview, he certainly wants more than his parents and expects to outdo even his father’s educational and occupational achievements. During the interview, Dwayne modestly recognized that his father’s achievements as an attorney are what driven and inspired him to persist in college. He related this personal motivation to his father’s success, commenting that he is a “good example to look at because he went to school twice...he’s accomplished a lot in his life.” Dwayne sees his father as a role model and as an inspiration for his own academic and

occupational achievements. In this regard, Dwayne's father serves as a symbolic source for Dwayne to progress across both educational and occupational pipelines. This demonstrates that Dwayne has a high level of cultural capital, and that this capital is indicative of his ability to persist in various settings (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005).

While mothers and fathers were central in encouraging persistence among many of the participants, the findings from this theme also garnered insights into how extended family members encourage some of the males in this study. For example, Michael is encouraged by the fact that most of his uncles graduated from college and earned bachelor's degrees; and how they are currently pursuing masters' and doctoral degrees. Thus, it could be inferred that the culture of educated men in Michael's family shapes his sense of belonging, and also reflects his desire to persevere in higher education.

The theme that emerged regarding this research question is that the underpinning of student success in school is parental support. Based on the interviews, it was apparent that parents believed that it was their responsibility to ensure that their children were prosperous in school. Despite acknowledging obstacles in their lives that made support challenging at times, it was recognized that building a foundation for their children's educational well-being involved making personal sacrifices and modeling behaviors they considered important for their children's achievement. Thus, parent involvement is central to student success (Epstein et al., 1997; Muller & Kerbow, 1993).

“Multi-generational bonds represent a valuable resource for families in the 21st century and are becoming more important than nuclear family ties for well-being and support over the course of our lives.” This quote was taken from an article entitled Importance of Family written by Dr. Bengtson (2005) explaining the importance of families. For example, David recollects

from his early years watching his mother work many jobs to provide for him and his siblings. He made it known from the interview that her diligence inspires him to work hard and persist in college. David appears poised to persist in college, mainly because of the motivation he draws from his mother's work ethic. Based on his own report, David is determined to persist not only for shaping his educational path, but also for changing his family's socioeconomic trajectory. In addition, most of the men in this study joyfully credited their persistence, encouragement, and support offered by family members.

### **Support Systems**

Additionally, the participants expanded on the importance of support systems while enrolled in college. While the type of support varies, they feel that support is critical. Strayhorn (2008) discovered the importance of peer support in inspiring persistence and academic achievement among African-American males in higher education. Nearly two-thirds of the males in this study stated that maintaining friendships and associations with other African-American men helped to foster their perseverance in college. Michael, for example, is encouraged by knowing that many of his African-American peers at the research site shared the same goal of persisting and earning a bachelor's degree. This shared aspiration is indicative of the importance for African-American men to maintain positive relationships with other African-American men on campus, specifically since these associations are tied to academic achievement and success (Fries-Britt, 1998).

Other examples from the interview data indicate that observing other educationally oriented African-American males help shape their persistence. Crawford is one of the participants who demonstrate this idea through his own experience. Witnessing the positive academic trajectories of his African-American peers is what motivated him to move toward the

graduation. Crawford specify that “seeing them [his peers] do well motivated me to do well,” and that their persistence “reminded me that I was close to the finish line.” Likewise, Lewis notes that seeing African-American peers from his precollege program exhibit academic achievement inspires him to persist and maintain high academic benchmarks. Skinner is also inspired to persist based on seeing his peers do well. In light of his observations, Skinner states, “students around here [on campus] in general, I see them you know...doing good things.” For Skinner, “good things” signify the positive behaviors associated with being successful in college.

The above-mentioned reflections confirm the effect that peers have on persistence. Michael’s own thought is equally affirming, but explains the mutual influence that he and his peers have on each other in their shared determination to earn a bachelor’s degree. This is Michael’s reply when asked to consider the individuals who encouraged his success in college, “It would be my peers. We encouraged each other and we stayed on each other. We continued to remind each other that it’s not about the person who finished first; it’s about the person who finished.”

The reflection demonstrates the importance of peer relationships in colleges and universities. More importantly, the comments corroborate the research finding that African-American men sustain and encourage each other’s academic success in college environments (Strayhorn, 2008). The power of peer-to-peer support and encouragement is evident in shaping college persistence among African-American men. Michael made this evident, when he unequivocally stated, “my peers for the most part, was what kept me going.”

Scott takes pride in his relationship with an African-American fraternity, a student organization focused on enhancing the retention of minority men at the research site. He spoke briefly about how his peers in the fraternity encouraged his persistence:



We [the student members] all encouraged each other to do well, not to give up on anything. Especially on some classes we knew were going to be a difficult. We always had our brothers there to help us.

Although not obvious in his statement, Scott realized that his relationship with his male African-American peers kept him going. Like Michael, Scott's remark unambiguously illustrates the importance of peer-to-peer encouragement in shaping his persistence at the research site.

Isaac brought a distinctive perception on how he is motivated to persist in college. Different from the others in this study, Isaac's perseverance is shaped by peers who are especially encouraging of his freelance artwork. He explained how his peers praised his artwork, thus inspiring him to envision success outside his own persistence in college:

My peers have seen my artwork because I've created some flyers for the MU. They've seen that and they said 'you can make real good money with this.' I said, 'I don't know about that [laughing]; it's just something I love to do.' They said, 'just keep that up because we know you will go far with this.' They encouraged me to follow my dream because they believed in me and know it'll be valued if I do that in life.

Sarason, Sarason, and Pierce (1990) have proposed that social support is important because it offers participants a "safety net" to explore and experiment in the world. Participants who received support feel that they have someone to turn to when difficulties surfaced.

Although core family members were essential in inspiring persistence among many of the participants, the findings from this theme also produced insights into how extended networks encouraged and inspired some of the participants in this study. For example, Michael is encouraged by the fact that most of his uncles persisted in college and earned a bachelor's degree; and now they each are currently pursuing masters and doctoral degrees. Thus, it could

be inferred that the culture of educated men in Michael's family not only shapes his sense of belonging, but reflects his desire to persist in higher education.

### **Sense of Motivation**

Aside from parents and support systems, the participants in this study have a strong sense of motivation to persist in higher education. As a group, their reasons to persist are driven by core beliefs and principles they have for themselves, and for impacting the life of others. Each participant imparted what drove him personally to be successful in college and to persist. The following section reflects their views as observed across three broad areas: (a) earning a degree and occupational choice, (b) making a difference, and (c) not wanting to become a statistic.

**Occupational choice.** When considering personal motivators for persisting in college, the majority of participants conveyed that earning a college degree allowed them to have broader career choices. These participants referenced occupational choice as a vital outcome for persevering in college. This comes as no surprise, given the recognized relationship between earning a bachelor's degree, stable employment, and financial stability (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

For these men, having a strong sense of what they want to do in life shaped their motivation to persist. Wesley is one of the participants motivated to persist by understanding his potential to emerge in the field of management. He expressed in his interview gratefulness for pertinent work experiences.

Timothy did not express his desire as overtly as did Wesley. He did communicate through his reserved nature his own potential for making a mark in corporate America. Like many college students, Timothy is acquainted with the need to persevere and graduated from college to achieve his professional and financial ambitions. Timothy did stay the course and

actualized these goals. Presumably, the course toward Timothy's graduation was marked by personal choices and behaviors, which have shaped his persistence to the end (Stage & Hossler, 2000).

Additionally, Arnold's motivation to persist is directed by his long-term goal of becoming a Chief Financial Officer in corporate America. He wants to "get as far in business" as he could and hope that securing a placement with a tax firm would be foundational to this mission. In their own ways, both Timothy and Arnold appear to emanate confidence in their capacities to be prosperous in corporate America.

Respectively, Anthony and Dwayne realize that persisting and graduating from college is the first step toward becoming a dentist, and a psychologist. Anthony's aspiration to become a dentist is firmly embedded in high school, after reading a book about three African-American men from Newark, NJ who made a "pact" to become doctors, in the midst of their own collective perils. Anthony explains how these men motivated his choice to become a dentist, thus informing his enthusiasm to persevere:

...my mom gave me this book when I was in high school called *The Pact*; it was about these three dentists, who were from bad neighborhoods. And how they all made it from those bad situations...they ended up going to dental school. They ended up making something out of themselves...so that's part of the reason why I want to become a dentist. I know that to be a dentist, you have to go to college. You have to start by getting a Bachelor's degree.

Essential to Anthony, the accomplishment of these three men becoming doctors is significant for his motivation to persist. He is aware that his application to dental school is conditional to his

sustained persistence at the research site. Consequently, matriculating and graduating from dental school will provide him the chance to pursue his preferred profession as a dentist.

Dwayne revealed during his interview his resolve to become an industrial and organizational psychologist. Realizing this aspiration helped Dwayne understand how earning a Bachelor's degree in psychology would help him progress toward his career goal. Dwayne is driven to persevere in college and toward his career ambition because of the "shape of the economy." More so, he is driven to persist because he knows the potential he has to realize occupational permanence and prosper in an economy that is to come. Dwayne conveyed, through his own experiences and observations, unease about the failure of African-American men not persisting in college, and discussed its problem relative to the changing economies:

I saw the importance of education in the economy because I saw Black people who were working in companies for 20 or so years get laid off, and they don't have an educational to fall back on. And I've heard many personal stories of people that have all experienced job loss and what they tell me that whatever you do, stay school and finish because education is investing in yourself.

Dwayne sums up the likely effects of failing to persevere in higher education in a changing economy. In focusing his statement toward African-Americans, he stresses how their persistence and graduation from college could counter the circumstances related to job loss and the unavoidable and adverse impact on financial shortfalls. Perhaps for Dwayne, "personal stories of people" may be the needed narratives for him to continue on his academic trajectory.

Michael is another contributor who is certain in what he wants to do in life. He is convinced that receiving a bachelor's degree in cultural geography would lead to a promising career in meteorology and weather research. He unashamedly affirms that his "ultimate purpose

is to use geography as a pre-requisite for meteorology, and this can only happen in graduate studies.” Michael’s declaration of his “ultimate goal” suggests the high degree of enthusiasm he has for persisting in higher education, and for following his occupational goals. At first glance, his reason may seem entirely based on his own discernment of being successful in higher education. In fact, his motivation to persist is due in part to a family culture that nurtured college attendance and perseverance. Michael explains below how his family environment and philosophy shaped his conviction to persist at the research site. He stated,

My dad went to college and so I guess it was an expectation that I go to college too; it’s always this huge thing [in my family] that you have to go to college in order to have a certain job and to be successful. I can’t really explain why; it’s the thing to do.

For these men, having a vision to earn a degree and grow into a prosperous professional is what drives their motivation to persevere. Relative to this theme, their interview data suggests they have a profound understanding for relating the need to be fruitful in college and pursuing the profession of their choice. This finding refutes the notion that African-American male college students are less likely to understand the significance in persisting in college and post-graduation employment opportunities (Bowen, Chingos, & Mc Pherson, 2009). The outcome also establishes that, like their “other” student colleagues, African-American men with expectations of obtaining their choice of employment or profession are likely to persist and be content with their college career (Leppel, 2002).

In their own way, these participants connected the significance of persisting in college to having flexibility in occupational or career choice. Christopher spoke succinctly about his opportunity to attend college, and what inspires him to finish. He stated,

I had options after high school. I could work at a job and work my way up. Or go to school and find a career. That's longevity. So, that [going to college] was my only option. I am the first to go to college, and actually finish. My parents started college but they had my brother. They had to drop out. I knew that I was going to college and was going to finish and actually help my family.

Christopher understands that numerous students decide not to cross the bridge into the higher education. However, he acknowledges that his own persistence in college might lead to better employment possibilities for him in the long run. Additionally, he prefers flexibility in employment options that comes from having formal education, notwithstanding the success co-managing a family's business.

According to Isaac, his parents convinced him that persisting and graduating from college is a worthy investment in his future. Isaac outlines his parents' thinking in this way:

They told me that college was going to give me a tremendous opportunity. And it's going to be life changing. I would have a better chance of getting a good job than if I didn't go to college.

Isaac is not the least disbelieving about his parents' cajoling, acknowledging that he "believed them, too" [his parents' persuasiveness]. His interview data reveals that subsequent to learning about the benefits of earning a degree, Isaac familiarizes himself with many innovative opportunities in the field of computer animation and graphic design. The ordinary thought of having his own company and "making a lot of money" moved Isaac to persist at the research site. Like Isaac, Skinner is also determined to make a lot of money, but in the essence of carrying out his passion. He expresses how persisting in higher education and subsequently earning terminal degrees in psychology could benefit him occupationally and financially.

I make a considerable [financial] living off of my degree. But if I go and focus on psychology, and I take my education further, I know that it will work itself out where I can be financially secure, and I can enjoy doing something I love to do.

As anticipated, the majority of members in this study understand their persistence relative to expanded career or entrepreneurial opportunities, which for them are related to financial stability. Their ultimate transitions out of college and engagement with these prospects should help them attain these results (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The essence of their conviction centers on their knack for linking persisting in college to having flexibility in choosing a career. This is an important insight, given that many African-American college students fail to visualize this connection (Leppel, 2002).

### **Discussion of the Results**

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine the effects of African-American male college students' part-time work and its impact on persistence. This researcher started the process with a presumption that part-time work, while attending college full time, contributes to retaining and helping African-American males at a predominantly white institution persist to graduation.

One of the characteristics that is observed is that their parents and family are always involved while they are in college. Their parents, even single-family parents, have lasting high expectations of their enrolling in and graduating from college. In addition, family members are a source of support and encouragement. Most participants in this study receive daily encouragement from both close and extended family members.

Additionally, the males expanded on the importance of support systems while enrolled in college. Strayhorn (2008) found the significance of peer support in encouraging persistence and

academic achievement among African-American men in higher education. Nearly two-thirds of the males in this study stated that maintaining friendships and associations with other African-American men help foster their perseverance in college. This shared aspiration indicates the importance for African-American men to maintain positive relationships with other African-American men on-campus, specifically since these associations are tied to academic achievement and success (Fries-Britt, 1998). More importantly, the above finding substantiates the research literature showing that African-American men support and encourage each other's academic success in college (Strayhorn, 2008).

Aside from parents and support systems, the males in this study have a strong sense of motivation to persist in higher education. The materialized data establishes that as a group, their reasons to persist are driven by core beliefs and principles they have for themselves, and for impacting the lives of others. Each participant imparted what drives him personally to be successful in college and to persist.

### **Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

#### **The impact working part-time, while enrolled full-time, has on persistence.**

The goal of this study is to determine if part-time work, while enrolled full time, have an impact on persistence for African-American males. However, it is found that many factors within the work environment contribute to the persistence of these African-American males.

Evidence from prior research data highlight the impact of working while enrolled varies by age and racial/ethnic groups; it also revealed that working while in school impact students differently depending on their socioeconomic status and institutional locations. The problem in drawing conclusions from the current research on postsecondary students who work is compounded by a more notable liability: the lack of theoretical frameworks or conceptual



models for understanding students who work in higher education. Perna, Copper, and Li's (2007) four perspectives on student work (public policy, sociocultural, human capital, and demographic) are used as a starting point, but much more needs to be done with them.

Undergraduate employment for wages is honorable, the majority of students work for wages, and that employment rates are growing (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). However, it is not known whether working has a positive or negative effect on student success nor if there is a conceptual model to account for the phenomenon.

Study results support the literature that presents the notion that there is a mixed picture of the relationship between work and college achievement. Some researchers are not sure whether the number of hours students work might have detrimental effects on persistence, time to degree, and other qualitative dimensions of the student experience (King, 2002; Stern & Nakata, 1991). Some students chose to work long hours, possibly combined with part-time enrollment, to lessen or evade loan indebtedness. However, such an approach decreased the possibility of degree completion by lessening the time available for school assignments and extending the amount of time needed to complete college requirements (Cuccar-Alamin & Choy, 1998; Cunningham & Santiago, 2008; King, 2002). Working full time or off campus has been found to adversely affect students' ability to partake in a range of activities that are associated with positive learning outcomes (Fjortoft, 1995; Lundberg, 2004).

However, researchers have noted that working benefits students by helping them finance their education. In addition, working offers a place to employ classroom learning in an applied setting. Working on campus reinforces students' bonds with fellow student employees as well as with faculty or staff supervisors because they spend more time involved in campus life (Astin, 1999). Campus employment widens and deepens students' networks with people who help with

academic or personal problems. Furthermore, work obligations compel students to budget their time effectively (Curtis & Shani, 2002). Ultimately, students who have distinct workplace experiences are preferred by employers because it is in those settings that students have opportunities to apply what they have learned in class, demonstrate their skills to perform under pressure, and work successfully with others.

Numerous studies of working students are implicitly or explicitly grounded based on a theoretical framework outlined by Tinto (1975), as there are no other frameworks to explain the effects of student employment. In essence, Tinto (1975) hypothesized that student success is a function of the student's abilities to foster strong academic and social relationships at their college. Activities that take students away from the academic and cultural campus environment can reduce their association to the campus and to significant instruments of socialization and support. As a result, the likelihood of persisting is reduced. As Pusser et al. (2007) contended, working especially off-campus competes with students' primary responsibility of focusing exclusively on academic pursuits. Working off-campus compels students to split their commitments between work and study by dedicating less time and attention to either (Hodgson & Spours, 2001) or to enriching academic and social activities (Fjortoft, 1995; Lundberg, 2004). The burdens of the dual obligations of study and work led to higher levels of stress (Hey, Calderon, & Seabert, 2003; Levin, Montero-Hernandez, & Cerven, 2008).

Despite these outcomes, the effect of student employment on educational outcomes such as grades, time to degree, and retention remains ambiguous, which is noted by various researchers. Some studies discovered that working students have lower GPAs than those who do not work (Hunt, Lincoln, & Walker, 2004) while others established that working students have greater persistence and higher graduation rates than their nonworking colleagues (Beeson &

Wessel, 2002). Working beyond a certain number of hours (typically between 15 and 20) is found to adversely impact preferred educational outcomes (Harding & Harmon, 1999; King, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Perna, Cooper, & Li, 2007; Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003). Work times below that threshold either had no effect (Bradley, 2006; Furr & Elling, 2000; Harding & Harmon, 1999; Nonis & Hudson, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) or had beneficial effects (Choy & Berker, 2003; Dundes & Marx, 2007; Hood, Craig, & Ferguson, 1992; Moore & Rago, 2007; Rago, Moore, & Herreid, 2005). Given these conflicting discoveries, the changing demographics of the undergraduate population, the rise in student employment, and the number of hours students work (Stern & Nakata, 1991; King, 2002), it is necessary to account for these variables to comprehend more completely how employment affects student success.

### **Other factors that influence African-American male students to persist through graduation**

The males in this study are persisting in part because of people who encourage or motivate their persistence. These men frequently acknowledge family members and peers who encourage them to sustain their trajectories and realize their educational goals. Primarily, these individuals are important to the men due to the emotional and social support they provide.

Barton and Coley (2010) indicated that employment opportunities are greater for African-American men with a college degree than for African-American men with only a high school diploma. Given that better employment opportunities and opportunities for graduate school are reported by all of the participants, the findings from this study also indicate that participants learned that attaining formal education beyond high school lead to greater flexibility in choosing a preferred occupation or profession. In fact, many of the participants gave examples that tied earning a bachelor's degree or advanced educational credentials to specific career goals. For

instance, Dwayne understands that persisting in college would help him make the transition into graduate school, and achieve his long-term goal of becoming a psychologist. In addition to employment options, some of the men related their persistence and consequent degree attainment to wanting to make a difference in the life of others, and also for not wanting to become a statistic. Jefferson and Chase communicated the latter reason not only as a way to illustrate a justification for persisting, but also to reject the stereotypes that correlates with negative outcomes of African-American males in education and society.

The men in this study are motivated to persist and earn a bachelor's degree. They understand how having aspirations and goals relate to persisting in higher education (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Strayhorn, 2008). They articulated specifically a goal to earn at least one educational credential beyond a bachelor's degree. Strayhorn (2008) stressed that, for African-American men, having graduate school aims are crucial to their college persistence. In fact, the idea these men hold for attending graduate school, whether during their early years or in higher education, have an impact on their persisting behaviors.

Anthony demonstrated persistence in view of the foresight he had in high school to become a dentist. In theory, as long as Anthony maintains this aspiration during the course of his college experience, the more likely he is to persist and move toward realizing his goals. Shifting from theoretical lenses to practice, Strayhorn and Johnson (2008) and Johnson (1999) instructed educators and professionals to take a practical approach in nurturing Anthony's ambition for ensuring his success. In an auspicious way, Anthony is surrounded by professionals in higher education who are available to foster his persistence and nurture his aspirations.

Kuk and Manning (2010) stated that students involved in campus-based groups are more likely to persist in college. Explicit outcomes show that participants who are involved in part-

time work, had opportunities to develop a work ethic, build their character, enhance their leadership skills, and partake in the campus community in various ways.

More vital to this study is how organizational involvement within a work environment provides African-American men with meaningful opportunities to engage and network with campus stakeholders. Foster conveys how his student involvement and leadership on campus led to connecting with peers from other student groups, and higher education administrators; notably the chancellor and two other members from the leadership team. In many ways, these associations allow African-American men to gain access to capital (Allen, 2010), which is valuable for shaping their persistence (Berger, 2000).

While the findings from this study demonstrate the advantages of students working in campus-based organizations, it continues to be unrealistic for some African-American men to participate in part-time work. The reality, as illustrated by Kasworm (2003), is that many African-American students already struggle to negotiate major life and educational responsibilities. This generate a need for administrators to acknowledge the changing demographic of college students within their respective institutions; and to devise best practices that would guarantee appropriate integration into the academic and social realms of the institution.

### **Limitations**

Case study research, which is “an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon set within its real-world context” (Yin, 2009, p. 18) allows the researcher to better comprehend the context of the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2009). Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest that, in a case study, due to opinions, feelings, views, standards, and assumptive worlds are interconnected. The researcher realizes that context matters in understanding the phenomenon

under exploration, when interviewing African-American male students about their work experiences while enrolled at the research site.

There are limitations to this case study approach. First, the sample size was small (n=35), which results in limited data. Second, all of the participants were African-American males who graduated in Spring 2016 from a predominantly White university. Third, participants' responses could be influenced by social desirability (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Lastly, though this study sought to determine the impacts of working on and off-campus on African-American students' academic engagement, no effort was made to describe the unique qualities of individual work experiences or the quality of the work atmosphere. Thus, the term *work* referred to all types of occurrences in which students conveyed that an employer paid them. As a consequence, the generalizability of the results to all working conditions and related situations may be tenuous.

### **Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

Although the percentage of African-Americans earning college degrees has nearly doubled over the past 20 years, African-Americans earn only 10% of college degrees, 12% of graduate degrees, and 7% of doctoral degrees (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Furthermore, African-American are more likely to attend lower-quality institutions and less likely to graduate (Mettler, 2014). Therefore, programs had to be crafted in an effort to keep this sizable group of African-American male students from dropping out. Just a few more of these students persisting to graduation would have an overwhelming impact on their future careers and their capacity to foster social change. Recognizing positive characteristics and behaviors of successful African-American males who persevere and graduate will help males at risk of dropping out of college, by inspiring them that they, too, can earn a college degree (Derby & Smith, 2004) and guarantee their future career success.

Recognizing and sharing these positive characteristics and behaviors with African-American male college students have the potential of keeping at least one student in school. If at least one student completes his degree, that one student would represent one more academically transformed life. That one change has the possibility of having an overwhelming positive effect on society and impact the data positively of African-American male college students' persistence.

Thus, understanding the areas that affect African-American male students such as relationships with parents, support systems, sense of motivation, and job satisfaction can help with their persistence in college. Systematically educating entities such as educational policymakers, academicians, and parents is the key element in ensuring that African-American male students not only enroll in college but also graduate.

The findings from this study suggest faculty, administrators, and staff can support persistence among African-American men at predominantly White institutions. Also, an institutional practice or formal program should be established using faculty and staff to frequently engage with African-American men in formal or informal academic and social programs or through other campus activities. Therefore, with this knowledge, faculty and staff could help African-American male students transition to college by offering mentoring and relationship building. Although methods vary, the intent is to enhance the college experience and improve retention through part-time work (Kezar, 2001).

This study finds that family members, peers, and supervisors aid in the persistence of African-American male college students by demonstrating that non-cognitive elements better explain persistence among African-American men. For example, the males in this study attribute their perseverance to the support and encouragement offered by family members and peers.

Higher education administrators should take the time to comprehend the roles that family and other sources of support play in influencing African-American male persistence. Not only does this have a positive effect on the educational direction of these students, but could also foster richer relationships among students, their families, faculty, and staff.

The participants in this study acknowledge diverse motivations for persisting in higher education. They largely associate their motivations to procuring future employment and to transition into graduate school. Professional staff should be available to connect African-American men with other people or to activities that can nurture these goals. Settings or activities could include any of the following: student academic learning centers, social activities or spaces that center on giving advice or exchanging ideas, formal forums that support how to negotiate persistence in the undergraduate and graduate education or individual and group meetings with career counselors. In addition, higher education staff at predominantly White institutions should try to be deliberate in involving African-American men early in ethnic-based student organizations since their involvement significantly enhances their persistence. These activities not only increase persistence, but they can ensure that students transition smoothly into desired occupational or educational settings of their choice (Locks, Bowman, Hurtado, & Osequera, 2008).

Employee job satisfaction is tied to a positive relationship with supervisors, coworkers, recognition, and personal development. Volkwein and Zhou (2003), in a study of job satisfaction of student employees, established that intrinsic satisfaction with one's work contributed most to levels of job satisfaction. Offering student employees various opportunities and types of work will help to keep the job exciting and increase levels of student employee



engagement. Efforts of this kind will contribute to participants appreciating their work, which is significant on overall employee job satisfaction (Eberhardt & Shani, 1984).

Connecting and developing relationships with supervisors, co-workers, and peers is also important to African-American male persistence. Some of the participants have opportunities to have meaningful interactions with their supervisors and co-workers. These interactions are helpful for participants to stay focused on earning their degree as well as receiving relevant work experience. However, there is a shortage of minorities (especially African-American men) in management roles at the research site, which indicates the need to formulate policies for recruiting minorities. More importantly, the presence of minority personnel could allow African-American men to have positive role models they can identify with which ultimately shapes their persistence in higher education (Fleming, 1984).

Engagement and commitment by career and student affairs professionals may offer the extra inspiration necessary to improving college persistence by African-American male students. Student affairs professionals using an understanding of the experiences of African-American men in society may contribute to an improvement in their career preparation and development during their college years. Furthermore, helping these men connect to college environments through part-time work is associated with persistence, particularly for African-American male students (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2003).

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This researcher sought to conduct inquiries with African-American males who graduated in Spring of 2016 to determine if their part-time work was a contributing factor to their persistence. The findings were more expansive than expected.

One of the characteristics that is prevalent with all of the participants who graduated was their parents and family are constantly involved with them and their future for college. Their parents, even single-family parents, have constantly high expectations of their enrolling in and graduating from college. Parents must be dedicated to imbuing African-American boys, as early as possible, with the belief that college is not an option but an expectation. Attendance in college should not be a matter of if but when and where. Parents, even those who did not graduate from college, must constantly reinforce that college is the only pathway to a promising career and a successful job. African-American males need to hear regularly wherever they are that enrolling in and graduating from college is not an exceptional event but rather the norm. Enrolling in and graduating from college should be a non-negotiable expectation of African-American families as it used to be in most White families (Tierney, 2010).

Additional research for this study would include a qualitative study that offers group interviews. The open-ended questions in this study generated telling replies, which suggests that engaging African-American male college students on a more personal level would garner more in-depth responses to contribute to the existing data. Facilitating several group interviews with current and recent graduate students would permit more open dialogue or discussion of their experiences in college to gain a broader perspective. The intentional interaction could generate higher response rates from students.

Persistence and graduation rates are being scrutinized closely and deliberated broadly by higher education administrators and government officials as it is commonly known in college student retention that the highest percentage of attrition occurs during freshman year (Choy 2001; Chen 2005). A related study could be designed to look specifically at the experience of African-American males focusing on the components of a successful freshman year, and whether

or not part-time employment is a contributing factor. Success would be defined as entering college students remain, re-enroll, and continue their undergraduate education. Understanding the complexities of the freshman year, when universities lose the highest percentage of students, would help higher education professionals in crafting the ideal freshman year experience, building a whole-person approach to what happens both inside and outside the classroom for African-American males.

Finally, research can explore the long-term effects of part-time employment to determine African-American male students' overall satisfaction during their undergraduate career. Thus, it is argued that work can positively affect satisfaction while in college. This is because part-time jobs can help college students cover expenditures for basic essentials, relieve financial burden of their parents, lower loan indebtedness, improve employability after graduation, offer opportunities to gain practical (transferable) skills, and provide an additional dimension to their social lives (Pinto, Parente, & Palmer, 2001; Wang et al., 2010). Therefore, it could also be argued that student employment can negatively impact students' satisfaction. This is because student employment or time spent on working may lead to reduced time spent on studying, school activities and gathering with family members and friends as underlined by the Coleman's (1961) zero-sum time-allocation model. As a consequence, students' satisfaction of those who work could also be negatively affected (Curtis, 2007; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006).

## **Conclusion**

In recent years, there has been substantial dialogue on the status of African-American students in higher education. Much of this discourse centers on the confounding problem of low persistence among African-American male undergraduates (Harper, 2012; Jackson & Moore,

2006). Flowers (2004) stated that the problem could be addressed with research investigating the paths that African-American men take toward a college degree.

Aware of this problem, Harper (2012) set out to document the experiences of African-American men who have successfully persisted and graduated from college. He did this to counter the academic narratives associated with low retention and failed persistence among African-American men, especially at predominantly White institutions. Despite Harper's (2012) work, there remains a critical responsibility for additional research, with possible implications for uncovering strategies that increase their persistence.

Similar to Harper (2012), the intent of this study is to determine if part-time employment contributes to the persistence of African-American college males at a predominantly White institution. The findings holistically suggest that persistence centers on more than one factor; it is found that African-American male achievers who were satisfied in their jobs, and who worked hard to make their own way through college, used motivation, had parents and a supportive system that has education as an integral component of life success. Furthermore, for many participants, being engaged outside the classroom environment has influenced educational attainment. Thus, feelings of being connected to college environments are associated with persistence (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow & Salomone, 2002).

A better relationship between parents and participants can also lead to better adjustments (Yazedjian et al., 2009; Kolkhorst et al., 2010). Studies have shown that students who are attached to their parents have higher self-esteem and life satisfaction while experiencing less stress, anxiety, and depression (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; McCarthy et al., 2001; Vivona, 2000).

Also, part-time employment did not solely contribute to persistence. Various components of support, such as supervisors, coworkers, recognition, and personal development contribute to the participants' desire to remain in college until graduation. Support systems are very important in the growth of African-American male college students. The support systems included teachers, family members, friends, and other students. Although these systems offered support for participation in college and emotional support and validation for experience, they also challenged the participants with expectations about the direction of their career goals (Pearson & Bieschke, 2001).

Lastly, Strayhorn (2008) specified that African-American men with aspirations beyond undergraduate education “were significantly more likely to persist in college than those who aspired to attain less education” (p. 79). This finding is probable because of its relationship to the precepts of goals and commitments; two pertinent constructs from internationalist theory that support the explanation of student persistence in higher education (Braxton et al., 2004). Aspiration is significant to student persistence and is considered practical for illustrating the outcomes that materialized from this theme. The findings also reveal that some of the participants in this study intend to earn educational credentials beyond a bachelor's degree. The data supporting this outcome revealed how the participants in this study associated earning a graduate degree to increased opportunities in their respective fields. In different ways, the discussions demonstrate the way each participant tied his educational aspirations to persisting in higher education.

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**Appendix A**

Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE  
CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ AND APPROVE THE DISSERTATION OF

Ami M. Tripp

CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Jillian Skelton, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

Heather Miller, Ed.D., Content Specialist

Dion Jones, Ed.D., Content Reader

ACCEPTED BY

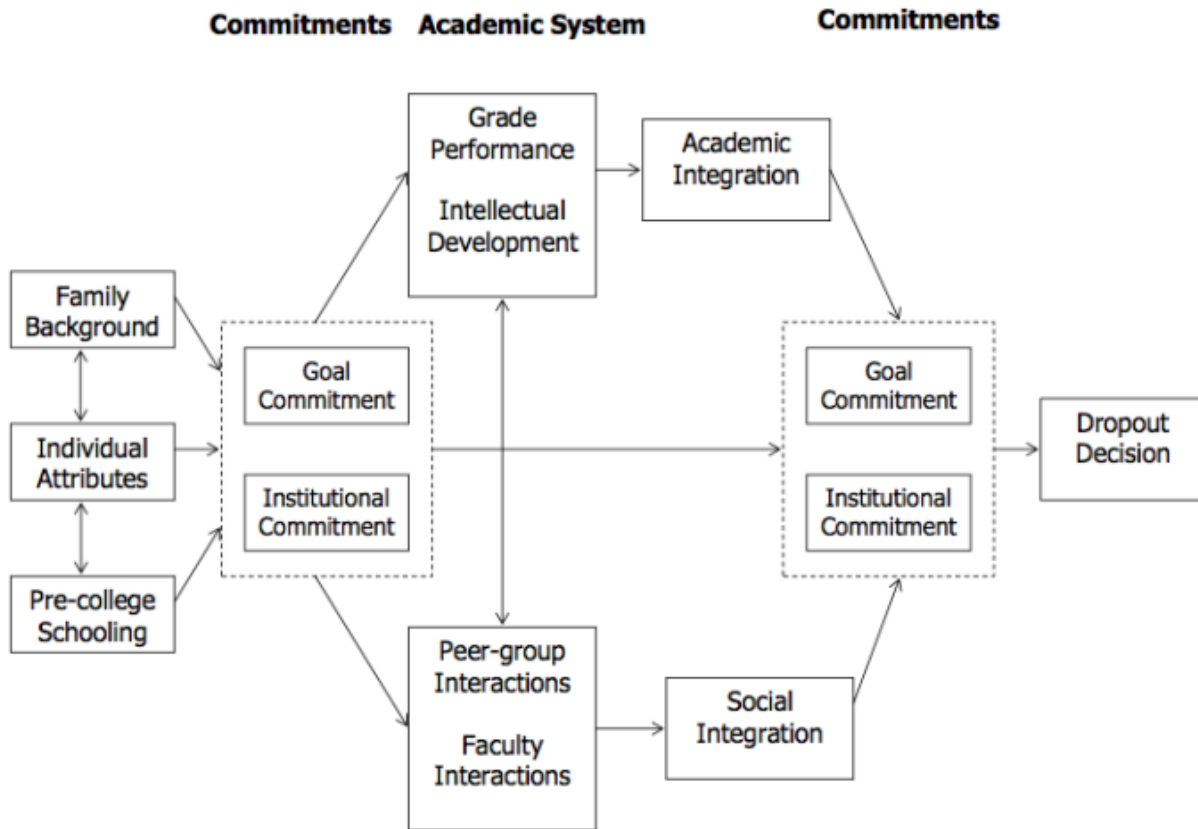
Joe Mannion, Ed.D.  
Provost, Concordia University-Portland

Sheryl Reinisch, Ed.D.  
Dean, College of Education, Concordia University-Portland

Marty A. Bullis, Ph.D.  
Director of Doctoral Studies, Concordia University-Portland

## Appendix B

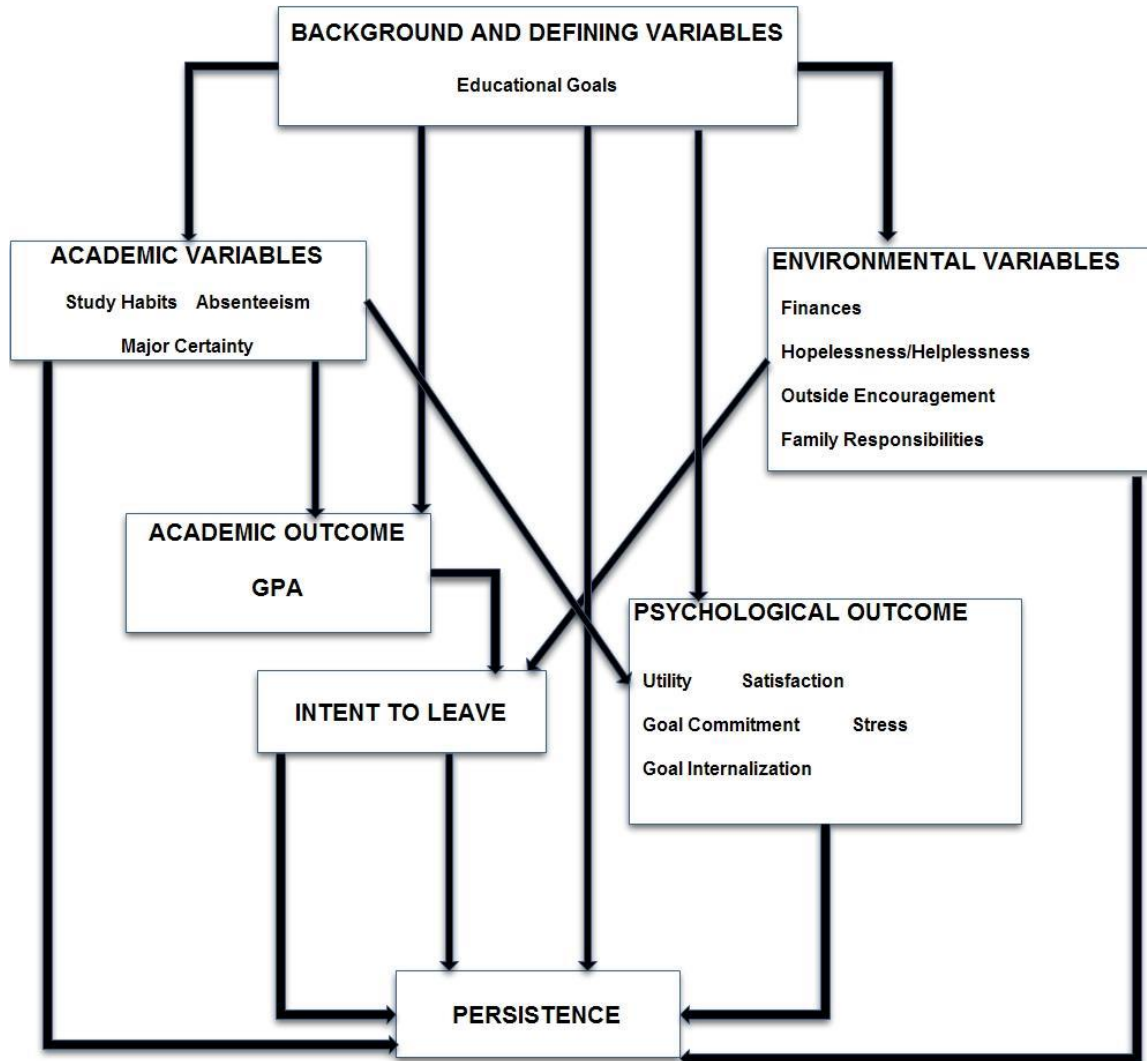
Tinto's Leaving College-Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition





## Appendix C

H. P. Mason (1998) A Persistence Model for African-American Male College Students



## **Appendix D**

### **Consent Form**

#### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

#### **The effects of African-American male college students' part-time work and its impact on persistence**

##### **WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?**

You have been invited to take part in a research study about how African-American male undergraduate students make progress or “persist” toward a bachelor’s degree in higher education. You were invited to take part in this research because you meet the study’s pre-determined criteria. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about one of 34 African-American men at the research site to do so.

##### **WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?**

The person in charge of this study is Ami Tripp at the Internship and Career Center. This study will fulfill her doctorate dissertation requirement. Dr. Jillian Skelton is guiding her in this research. Dr. Skelton is a professor at Concordia University, Portland.

##### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?**

By doing this study, the investigator hopes to understand if part-time employment was a contributing factor of African-American male undergraduate students’ persistence to graduation. In addition, the researcher hopes to understand what other factors contribute to persistence.

##### **ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

You could be excluded from this study if you did not graduate from the research site in spring of 2016, do not self-identify as an African-American male, and are under age 18 or over 22.

##### **WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?**

The research procedures will be conducted at the Center for African Diaspora or any place, in Davis, of your choosing. You will need to come to this location for the initial interview. There may be a need for a follow up interview. The second interview will not take longer than 2 hours. The total amount of time you will be asked to either volunteer for this study is 4–5 hours over the course of 3 months during the 2017 winter quarter.

##### **WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?**

During the first interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences related to what factors contributed to your persistence to graduation. In a possible second interview, you will be asked clarifying questions.

#### WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

To the best of my knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. The research does not involve any procedures that could cause possible physical harm. You may find some questions asked during the interview to be upsetting or stressful. If so, I can tell you about some people who may be able to help you with these feelings.

#### WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not get any personal benefit from taking part in this study.

#### DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering. As a student, if you decide not to take part in this study, your choice will have no effect on your academic status or grade in the class.

#### WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

#### WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

I will make every effort to keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which I may have to show your information to other people. For example, I may be required to show information, which identifies you to people who need to be sure that I have done the research correctly. These would likely be people from Concordia University, Portland and the research site.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When I write about the study to share it with other researchers, I will write about the combined information that has been gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. The results of this study may be published, but your name and other identifying information will be kept private.

Every effort will be made to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave information from the interviews. All written documents and electronic information related to this research will remain secure, and only accessible to the researcher and her advisor.

#### CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. The individual conducting the study may need to withdraw you from the study. This may occur if you are not able to follow the directions they give you, or if they find that your well being in the study is more risk than benefit to you.

**ARE YOU PARTICIPATING OR CAN YOU PARTICIPATE IN ANOTHER RESEARCH STUDY AT THE SAME TIME AS PARTICIPATING IN THIS ONE?**

You may take part in this study if you are currently involved in another research study. It is important to let the investigator know if you are in another research study. You should also discuss with the investigator before you agree to participate in another research study while you are enrolled in this study.

**WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?**

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Ami Tripp at xxx-xxx-xxxx. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at Concordia University, Portland. I will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

**WHAT IF NEW INFORMATION IS LEARNED DURING THE STUDY THAT MIGHT AFFECT YOUR DECISION TO PARTICIPATE?**

If the researcher learns of new information in regards to this study, and it might change your willingness to stay in this study, the information will be provided to you. You may also be asked to sign a new informed consent form if the information is provided to you after you have joined the study.

**WHAT HAPPENS TO MY PRIVACY IF I AM INTERVIEWED?**

Your privacy will be protected at all times. Your real name will not be identified on any documents or other transcripts, and will be replaced by a pseudonym (false name) assigned by the participant or the researchers.

---

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

---

Date

---

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

---

Name of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent

---

Date

**Appendix E:**  
**Interview Questions**

Research Question #1

How do African-American males perceive working part-time, while enrolled full time, to have an impact on their persistence?

1. Thinking back to your high school experiences, do you feel that your high school prepared you for the academic demands of college? If yes, in what ways? If no, then why not?
2. Did you participate in any college preparatory or summer bridge programs prior to attending college? If so, tell me about your experiences in these programs.
3. What led you to enroll in college?
  - a. Probes: What values or knowledge did family members instill in you regarding enrolling and being successful in college?
4. b. Probes: What values or knowledge did high school staff instill in you regarding enrolling and being successful in college?
5. How would you describe your mother's educational background?
6. How would you describe your father's educational background?
7. Describe for me your educational goals.
8. Describe for me your career or occupational goals.
9. What job did you hold while enrolled?
  - a. Probes: What did you do?
  - b. Probes: How did the job impact your schooling?
10. Tell me about the satisfaction of your experiences as a college student at this university.

## Research Question #2

What other factors influenced Africa-American male students to persist through graduation?

1. What are some of the things that you believe have stood/are currently standing in your way of making progress toward a bachelor's degree?
2. What has helped/could help you to make more progress along the way?
3. What campus-based student organizations are you involved in? How do these organizations help you make progress in college?
4. What extracurricular activities on campus are you involved in? How do these activities help you make progress in college?
5. Tell me about those individuals who encouraged your success in college.
6. What drives you to be successful in college?
7. If you were invited to speak to a group of African American male high school students with aspirations to attend college, what advice would you offer them for being successful in college?

## Appendix F

### Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

#### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

#### **Explanations:**

##### **What does “fraudulent” mean?**

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

##### **What is “unauthorized” assistance?**

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.



## Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association.

\_\_\_\_Ami Tripp\_\_\_\_  
Digital Signature

\_\_\_\_Ami Tripp\_\_\_\_  
Name (Typed)

\_\_\_\_11/13/17\_\_\_\_  
Date