AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Dana M Emerson for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education presented on March 31, 2016.

Title: African American Males' Perceptions of Success while Attending Community College

Abstract approved: _____

Larry D. Roper

Background: African American males' experience in higher education is often categorized with negative terminology that does not reflect notions of success. Most research addressing the success of African American males in higher education illuminates factors that impede access to success and is often situated in university settings. Very little research is dedicated to examining the experiences of African American males in community colleges and even less research is published on their perceptions of success

Purpose: To examine and understand the concept of success from the perspective of African American males enrolled in community college and identify how institutional and non-institutional factors affect their concept of success.

Setting: Interviews were conducted at community colleges in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States.

Subjects: Seven African American males enrolled in at least 6 credits at a community college in were interviewed.

Research Design: Qualitative interviews using a semi-structured question matrix; the question matrix was designed to elicit responses related to defining a personal concept of success.

Data Collection and Analysis: Face- to- face interviews were conducted on college campuses. Audio recordings were collected, transcribed, and then coded using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. Coded excerpts were grouped into prominent themes.

Findings: Six primary themes were identified from the interview data.

- Almost all participants stated that academic success had nothing to do with academic performance. Academic success was situated in overcoming challenges in an academic environment.
- Success in general is more important than academic success.
- The concept of success changes based on life experiences.
- Feeling isolated, positive and negative interactions with faculty and peers contributed to the concept of success.
- Negative imagery, stereotypes, financial status, and family support contribute to how African American males perceive themselves as successful.

- Overcoming daily challenges based on race is indicative to how African American males equate success.

Conclusions: While persistence and completion are important, academic success as defined by African American males in community college does not pertain to academic performance. Deeply rooted issues of race and racism influence a general definition of success. Concepts of success change overtime as significant life events occur and as more encounters with racism are realized. Overcoming challenges that affect the intersections of race, class and gender are more accurate descriptions of success. African American males in community college are very aware of how fragile their lives are as targets of racial profiling. Avoiding situations where others may not feel safe in their presence and continuously compensating for racial barriers that must be overcome in order to succeed is burden that is carried daily. For African American males, the only concept of success that matters is surviving the daily challenges of being an African American male for example, not losing their life at the hands of police officers.

African American Males' Perceptions of Success
while Attending Community College

by
Dana M. Emerson

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APPROVED:

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Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Dana M. Emerson, Author

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To Kyle, thank you for choosing me. Remember, 98% of Success is Support …I've got your back!

And finally, to my husband LAB, thank you for always being there and reminding me to trust myself.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Community colleges are charged with providing access to education and creating

pathways for student success. African Americans generally enter the realm of higher

education via community college as an accessible and inexpensive a pathway to attaining

quality post-secondary education. Unfortunately, the majority of African American male

students in community college begins their college career in developmental education

classes and rarely persists to college level African American Males in Community

College (Achieving the Dream, 2011). Male students who find themselves in this

scenario are labeled unsuccessful, because they fail to earn a certificate in one year, attain

a degree in two-years, or transfer to a university. Esters and Mosby (2007) noted that

African American males are "disappearing from community colleges before they

complete any meaningful goals, and those who remain lag behind other learners on

almost every indicator of academic achievement" (p. 45). Why are African American

males not succeeding in community college?

Student success in community colleges has been defined by many entities. Yet,

the definitions of success that guide practices and programs at the community college are

generally quantified in terms of graduation and persistence rates, grade point averages,

and class completion. Many scholars have noted the meager rates of persistence and

graduation by African American males (Carter, 2008; Perrakis, 2008; Wood & Turner,

2011). Success defined by quantitative measures ignores other attributes and perspectives

of success. Specifically, quantitative measures do not take into account personal

narratives of success. A narrow perspective of student success fails to recognize other

positive outcomes of the community college experience. A qualitative approach to examining student success in community colleges could expand a definition of success beyond numbers and influence programs and practices designed to aid African American students (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Wirth & Padilla, 2008). Particularly, an amended definition of student success from the perspective of African American male students could provide valuable information for educators and policy makers that are concerned with the educational careers of these students.

Research Problem

The community college is the primary entry point for African American males into postsecondary education. The majority of African American males (63.1%) enter higher education via private and public two-year institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The American Council on Education's (2009) *Minorities in Higher Education* status report pointed to increases in community college enrollment of African Americans by 46% between 1996 and 2006. As noted earlier, African Americans have the lowest three-year graduation rates of all minority males. In 2002, African Americans represented 14% of the bachelor's degree attainment rate, while White Americans made up 26% of this rate (College Board, 2009). Addressing the disparity in educational attainment between White, Black and Hispanic students, in 2004, Kay McClenney said, "The gap is dangerous. It is intolerable. It is a blight on America's future. And it is worse in community colleges than elsewhere in post-school education" (quoted in Esters & Mosby, 2007). Dr. McClenney is the director of the Community College Survey of

Student Engagement. Wood and Turner (2010) have noted that African American males' experiences in higher education are depicted by "dismal persistence, graduation, and academic success rates…within the community college context" (p.136).

A published report titled "Charting a Necessary Path" prepared by the Washington, D.C. based nonprofit group the Education Trust indicated that, although 80% of freshmen entering community college intend to eventually earn a bachelor's degree, only 7% of low-income and minority community college students attain a bachelor's degree within 10-years (Engle & Lynch, 2009). Most research regarding the success of African American males in higher education is concentrated in four- year public and private institutions. African American males' performance in public two-year institutions or community colleges rarely gets examined.

The underachievement of African American males in higher education continues to be an issue as noted in their struggle to succeed, i.e. graduate from community college. Their academic performance has been examined from multiple perspectives. However, most of those perspectives address the experiences of African American males in universities and attribute factors for succeeding or not succeeding. Although the voices of African American male students were utilized to identify barriers to success, define relationships between students and teachers as well as the campus climate and culture their voice has not been attributed to a personal definition of success in their pursuit of higher education. This study is about giving voice to the concept of student success from the perspective of African American males in community college so that they gain access to success instead of failure.

The Completion Agenda (McPhail, 2011) challenged each public community college in the United States with the task of increasing graduation rates. African American males, particularly in community colleges, have been historically identified as a group with very low graduation and success rates. Factors that influence success and barriers that prevent success have been examined at all levels of post-secondary education for African American males and females (Glavan, 2009; Museus, 2011; Witherspoon, 2011; Wood & Turner, 2011). Historical practices of racism and oppression are still experienced by students of color in higher education. Policies, practices and programs that should be aiding African American males in their success often create experiences that make them feel isolated. Understanding how African American males conceptualize success will benefit in the development and execution of practices and programs that serve to nurture the success of these students.

This study contributes to the existing literature by adding the voice of African American males in community college to the discourse of student success in higher education and using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a framework for understanding the necessity of including their voice. Recent attention has been paid to African American males in community college. Researchers have addressed factors that contribute to success, relationships with faculty and, the ways in which African American males fit in to the culture of the college (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010; Davis & Palmer, 2011; Harper, 2006; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Maxwell & Shammas, 2007; Millane, 2011; Museus, 2011; Museus & Harris, 2010; Nan & Zia, 2010; Wood, 2010; Wood & Turner, 2011; Lee, 1999). Barriers to success have also been examined (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010;

Carter, 2008; Closson, 2010; Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2010; Kunjuku,

1988; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Ogbu, 1992). This study is aimed at a more personal

relationship with success through the voice of African American males.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to capture, examine, and articulate the concept of

success as expressed by African American males currently enrolled in community college

as fulltime or part-time students. Capturing their concept of success may advance

programs and practices aimed at increasing student success by supporting and including

their notions of success. Additionally, adding the voice of a historically underrepresented

and oppressed group to a concept that is currently driving post-secondary education

allows African Americans to participate in defining success and create a space for their

stories to be heard. This study would not be complete without contrasting the definition

of success from an institutional perspective, i.e., the language used to construct, support

and deliver the message of success with the conceptions of success that African

American male students hold.

Understanding that the power of words creates social realities is foundational to

creating counter- narratives, which is a tenet of Critical Race Theory. Olmsted (2010)

developed a three-part rhetorical model based on Searle's (1970) Speech Act to

demonstrate the importance of sharing a counter-narrative. In order for a speech act to

become reality, groups must be able to name their identity, world, and reality. Second,

the meaning of the named identity has to be institutionalized into the culture. The

meaning of the named reality becomes action or a social reality. Finally, the social reality needs to be enforced. This is the hegemonic practice of creating a dominant narrative and CRT advocates that African Americans and other minorities employ and to create counter-narratives. Giving voice to the concept of success from the perspective of African American males provides an opportunity to share the naming of their reality and instituting it into the culture of higher education. Finally, reporting their voice will begin the process of enforcing their reality. Additionally exploring the language of current programs, policies and practices designed to promote success, may reveal that they create barriers to success for African American male students in community college.

Research Questions

The notion of student success is difficult to measure because of the varying definitions and terms used to address this idea. Terms such as persistence, completion, and student engagement used in conjunction with or substituted for success, bring about challenges in attempts to answer the question, "What is student success?" Moreover, very little research has been conducted reporting the voice of students in regards to their perceptions of success.

In the case of African American male students in higher education, success has been studied from the position of failing to persist, failing to graduate, and low grade point averages (Davis & Palmer, 2010; Hall, 1999; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008; Lewis, 2010; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Perrakis, 2008; Wood & Turner, 2011). A critical lens has been employed by many

researchers to analyze the experiences of African American males in higher education. Examinations of programs, policies, practices, and social inequities that challenge the achievement of success by African American males have been reported (Carter, 2005; Carter, 2008; Kumasi, 2011; Lason-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Studies of African American males have addressed success in positive connotations; however, those studies tend to focus on four-year institutions and position African American males as exceptions to the rule (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010; Blanding, 2010; Hughes, 2010; Stinson, 2008). This study was poised to examine the relationship between African American males' concept of success and the ways in which success is defined and implemented in community college programs and practices. Furthermore, African American male students' concept of success should be employed in the development and redesign of programs and models in community college dedicated to increasing retention, persistence, and graduation rates of this targeted group.
The research questions to be explored are as follows:

1. What is the concept of success held by African American men while pursuing their academic goals in community college?

2. What institutional factors contribute to their concept of success?

3. What non-institutional factors contribute to their concept of success?

Examining the concept of student success from the perspective of every student group is important. For the purposes of this study, African American males are studied due to the limited research on this group particularly in community college. Additionally,

collecting the stories of African American males provides an opportunity for their

traditionally silenced voices to be heard. Exploring a counter- narrative of success

provided by African American males can provide meaningful information for the

restructuring of programs intended to promote their completion rates in community

colleges.

Rationale and Significance of Research

Identifying the concept of success from the perspective of African American

males in community college and determining how their definition is represented in the

standard or institutional definition of success is significant for a number of reasons. As

noted earlier, African American males have the lowest graduation rates from community

college of all minority groups (Achieving the Dream, 2011; Esters & Mosby, 2007). In

the summer of 2009, President Obama set a national goal of raising the number of

community college graduates by 5 million by the end of the decade (Gonzalez, 2011).

Policy makers, educators and independent organizations have directed funding to develop

and re-examine programs aimed at promoting student success. These programs and

initiatives are in place to address the goal of increasing the number of community college

graduates. African American males, particularly in community college, have been

repeatedly identified as a group with very low graduation and completion rates. In an

effort to increase the graduation rate for African American males it is necessary to give

voice to them and determine how they define success. By allowing the voice of African

American males to resonate in the redevelopment of programs and practices that address

student success as a goal these students may be more open to utilizing these resources and thus may increase their graduation rates.

Current initiatives in higher education, such as Achieving the Dream[1] and Access to Success,[2] focus their efforts on completion and education equity. Students from underrepresented groups, i.e., African Americans, Latino and Native Americans, are targets for data collection to guide institutions towards improving their success and graduation rates. A recent study (Lewis, 2010) specified early predictors for success and persistence for community college students. During the first year at community college, indicators for success included completing 20 credits, completing all classes attempted, and declaring a major (Achieving the Dream, 2011). The same study highlighted that African Americans have the lowest rate (24%) of completing 20 credits in their first year at community college (Achieving the Dream, 2011). Despite the low rate of credit completion in their first year of community college, African Americans students completed a credential, transferred, or persisted to a third year at a rate of 38% compared to Hispanics at 45% and Whites 46%. A formidable place to start encouraging the success of African Americans in community colleges is to harness their conception of success and apply it to the development and implementation of programs, policies, and practices designed to support success.

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[1] Achieving the Dream is a national initiative that started in 2004 with the charge to reform higher education and close achievement gaps using evidence-based models for institutional and policy change.
[2] Access to Success is a program that is part of the Education Trust whose goal is to increase access to higher education to students of color by focusing on equity and affordability.

Published studies and articles that focused on African American males in education often highlight this group of students as unsuccessful in their pursuit of higher education (Carter, 2008; Collins-Eaglin, & Karabenick, 1993; Reynolds, 2012). Furthermore, African American males are often categorized in terms that prophesize failure (Chen, 2010; Education Trust, 2009). The studies that paint African American males in the positive light of success are generally concentrated in the examination of four–year institutions. These studies focus on institutional and social factors that contribute to success and do not take into account the voice of African American males and their conceptions of success (Hughes, 2010; Nan & Zia, 2010; Tatum, 2004, Wood, 2010). This study seeks to address this deficiency by gathering information from students and examining success from their perspective through a critical lens. Since there is limited data in relation to the community college setting, this study will be situated in that environment. The collection and examination of this information may reveal that some programs, practices, and policies in community colleges that are designed to lead students to success may in fact create a barrier to success, completion and graduation.

Definition of Key Terms

The following paragraphs provide definitions of key terms that will be used throughout this study.

Concept/perception. For the purposes of this study the definition of conception points to the sub-definition of Self-perception or Self-concept. According to Hattie (1992) Self-concept involves the process of coming to know and judging the significant

characteristics of the self. In determining conception for this study, it is the process of applying and judging self- knowledge.

Success. The purpose of this study is to capture a definition of success from the perspective of African American males in community college. Therefore, an operational definition of success has yet to be determined. However, for the purposes of creating a reference for the definition of success, the dominant narrative of success as it relates to completion is used. Therefore, success is defined as the attainment of a degree or certificate or transferring to a university.

Voice. Hendrix (2005) examined the lived experiences of African American trustees in community colleges. In his study he provided a definition for "voice" that is appropriate for this study. Hendrix (2005) provided the following definition of voice:

> Voice is defined as the expressed perceptions, ideas, actions, values, and expectations of the participants in this study speaking as community college trustees. In essence, voice manifests itself as the expressions of feelings, attitudes, and intentions of the participants rather than the literal words used to describe events or situations (p.4).

Summary

African American males are reported to have low persistence, graduation, and success rates in their pursuit of higher education. This is especially true in the community college setting. Reports addressing the success of African American males tend to focus on their experiences in four-year institutions with very limited coverage of their experiences in two-year institutions. Moreover, these reports often fail to capture African American males' concepts of success.

A tenet of Critical Race Theory points to the importance of storytelling or giving voice to African Americans and other minority populations as way to counter historical racism and oppression. When examining the institutional narrative of success in higher education, particularly in the community college, the voice of African American males is silent. It is important to address this component of their experience in higher education because as one of many underrepresented populations in the realm of higher education, institutional racism and inequity is part of their narrative as being unsuccessful.

The purpose of the study was to capture, examine, and report the conceptions of success that African American males in community college hold. More specifically, the primary research question is: What is the concept of success held by African American males while pursuing their academic goals in community college?

When educators and policy makers develop and redesign programs and practices intended to help these students succeed, it is imperative to consider their concept of success so that they may obtain and respond to the resources that are available to them. Examining the language of the dominant culture and contrasting it with the language of African American males may provide an answer for why these students are not succeeding at the rates of other minority males and African American females in community college. Additionally, an examination of the culture of higher education and the shift in students' identities that are needed to navigate the culture of higher education may identify barriers to success that African American males experience. Moreover, an examination of the definition of success in the voice of African American males gives them an opportunity to share their voice and reality and may provide insight into how to

help these students succeed in their pursuit of higher education. Thus, the research

question explored in this study is how do African American males in community college

conceptualize student success.

CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Most of the research addressing the success of African Americans males in higher education illuminates factors that impede and reveal barriers to success and is often situated in university settings. Very little research is dedicated to examining the experiences of African American males in community colleges, and even less research is published on their perceptions of success. This study examines the concept of success from the perspective of African American males in community college. The purpose for the review of literature was to provide a context for the present study. It identified definitions of success, published rates of success, constructed cultural and social identities, and barriers to success, and factors that support success.

Data Collection for Literature Review

Data collection for this project utilized two primary sources. The first source were the electronic databases available through Oregon State University Library. Searches for journal articles and reports were conducted using Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Journal Storage (JSTOR), Ebscohost Electronic Journal Service, and PsycINFO. The ProQuest database was used to search for dissertations. Some key terms used in the search included student success, African American males, minority students in higher education, community college, persistence and retention, and Critical Race Theory. The search yielded four dissertations, three books, and over two hundred journal articles. Initially the date range of article and document selection was limited to 1992 – 2012, representing a 20- year span of published work, however due to the nature of

history associated with African Americans and their relationship with higher education, a

secondary search removed the date limitation to capture a richer body of literature.

Although all information addressing the academic success of African Americans is

important and useful in this body of research, articles that addressed this population

specifically situated in the K-8 level of schooling were eliminated. Due to the limited

nature of information available addressing African American males in community

college, articles containing high school and four year institutions were included in this

search. Table 1 highlights resulting outcomes from peer-reviewed library searches

between the years 1992-2012.

Table 1

Title Search Table

Keyword or Phrase	EBSCOhost	ProQuest	JSTOR	PsycInfo	ERIC
Academic At-Risk African American Male College Students	21	34	10	5	696
Academic Achievement Among African American Male College Students	29	47	12	15	30
African American Male College Student Experience	22	88	65	37	17
African American Male Student Success in College	2	16	8	10	7
African American Male Persistence in College	12	4	2	4	14

Table 1 Continued

Access and Persistence Among African American Males in Community College	0	1	0	0	1
Motivation of African American Male College Students	0	11	2	0	4
Barriers to Success Among Minority College Students	3	9	11	5	1
Campus Engagement Among African American Male College Students	3	13	5	0	5
College Enrollment for African American Males	6	14	6	0	5
African American Male College Students	45	26	18	14	113
Student Success of African American Male Students	23	5	25	10	78
Student Retention of African American Male Students	13	21	11	11	18
Student Achievement Among African American Male Student	3	4	5	3	2
Social Support Among African American Male Students	2	15	10	4	2

Themes from Review of Literature

The following subsections describe the themes examined in the literature as they

pertain to student success. One recurring theme is the definition of success. Success is

defined from multiple perspectives when it is aligned with education. These multiple

perspectives are examined as well as the rates at which African American males succeed

in post-secondary education as compared to their counter parts. In order to successfully

participate in the culture of higher education students need to adopt an identity for this culture. Social and cultural identities are explored in addition to factors that create barriers to success and those that support success. Finally, reported models of student success programs and practices specifically developed for underrepresented students are examined.

Definition of success. Community colleges often consider student satisfaction, goal attainment, commitment, and persistence as indicators of student success (Astin, 1997; Braxton, Vesper, & Hossler, 1995; Hirschy, Bremer, & Castellano, 2011; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek 2006; Stovall, 2000; Tinto, 1997). Most researchers and educators agree on quantifiable indicators such as enrollment, grades, persistence, length of time to degree attainment, and graduation as ways to measure the concept of success. Wirth and Padilla (2008) defined student success as "progress toward graduation or actually graduating college" (p.688). Traditional measures of academic achievement, such as scores on standardized exams, college grades, and credit hours completed in consecutive terms, represent progress toward the degree (McPhail, McKusick, & Starr, 2006; Wirth & Padilla, 2008), which satisfies the quantifiable definition of success. Gutierrez and Dantes (2009) reported that "federally mandated graduation rates are often used as the sole measure of student success" (p. 958). Yet, Stovall (2000) suggested that success is a function of persistence countering student departure or dropout rates.

For the community college, student transfer rates to a four–year institution are also used to indicate student success. The percentage of students who successfully

transfer to the university or other four–year institutions is perceived as a measure of institutional effectiveness and student success. These students have successfully completed the course work necessary to gain entrance into a university and pursue the goal of attaining a baccalaureate degree. Another quantifiable indicator of student success is gainful employment as a result of program completion (Kuh et al., 2006). Still other measures of student success are income and career advancement.

Qualitative outcomes are also definitive measures of student success. Some of the more difficult aspects of student success to measure are the extent to which students are satisfied with their experience and feel comfortable and affirmed in the learning environment (Kuh et al., 2006; Stovall, 2000). Student persistence research is another area where new ideas have materialized about the reasons that influence students' ability and commitment to persist. Tinto (1997) defined student persistence as a "function of dynamic relationships between the individual and other actors within the college and their home community" (p.605). Persistence and completion as modes of defining student success emerged in opposition to research focused on departure rates (Wirth & Padilla, 2008).

Studies of nontraditional students, commuters, and other underrepresented populations have identified external factors that affect student persistence, such as parental encouragement, support of friends, and finances (Braxton et al., 1995; Cabrera, Castenada, Nora, & Hengstler 1992; Glavan, 2009; Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams, 2005). Additional factors include daily interactions in the campus environment with peers and faculty. Research suggests that the greater the sense of integration felt by

students, the greater likelihood that they will persist at the college until graduation (Astin, 1997; Stovall, 2000; Tinto, 1997).

Student success is also related to desired student and personal development outcomes that offer benefits to individuals and society. These include becoming proficient in writing, speaking, critical thinking, scientific literacy, and quantitative skills and more highly developed levels of personal functioning represented by self-awareness, confidence, self-worth, social competence, and sense of purpose (Kuh et al., 2006; Wirth & Padilla, 2008).

What constitutes student success is not very clear in published literature. The concept is multi-pronged indicating multiple ways of defining success. Success from a traditional perspective includes retention, degree attainment, academic achievement, and advancement (Cuseo, 2007). Although the definition of success embodies four measurable units, there is a fifth component that is not expressed in quantifiable terms. Holistic Development addresses the evolution of the "whole student" as success. Community colleges embrace multiple interpretations of success. Defining success from the perspective of African American males who attend community college could add richness to the multi-faceted definitions currently embraced in higher education. Table 2 lists the multiple terms used to define student success in higher education and their generally accepted definitions with examples.

Table 2

Definitions of Student Success

Term	Definition	Example
Student Retention (Persistence)	Students who have entered college, stay in college and re-enroll to continue their undergraduate education	First- year students return to college for their sophomore or second-year.
Educational Attainment	Students who have entered college, stay or persist to the completion of their program and attainment of their degree, certificate, or other measurable goal.	Two-year college students persist to completion of the associate's degree, and 4-year college students persist to completion of the baccalaureate degree.
Academic Achievement	Students achieve satisfactory or superior levels of academic performance as they progress through their college experience.	Students earn a GPA of 2.0 or higher and avoid academic probation or qualify for academic honors
Student Advancement	Students proceed to and succeed in gainful employment or educational undertakings aligned with their earned certificate or degree	2-year college students continue their education at a 4-year college, or 4 year college students are accepted into graduate schools or obtain gainful careers after completing their baccalaureate degree
Holistic Development	The development of the whole student including multiple intelligences such as emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence	

Adapted from "The Big Picture" by J. Cuseo

Current initiatives directed at community colleges and recent literature that

address success and completion have included African American males in groups labeled

at-risk (Hernandez, 2010), disadvantaged (American Association of Community

Colleges, 2011), under achievers (Balduf, 2009) and non-completers (Winter & Harris, 1988). These labels indicate that these students do not meet the criteria of attaining academic success. Success in this context is defined as graduating from a community college (also referred to as a two –year college) with an associate's degree or completing a one-year program. Brown and Fultz (2008) examined the emergence of educational policy discourse that historically addresses the academic underachievement of African American males. They acknowledge that policy recommendations are generally focused on the needs of the institution and rarely prescribe what African American males need from institutions in order to succeed. Harper, Patton and Wooden (2008) examined educational policy through the lens of CRT. They reported that historical and current educational policy intended to address access and equity are not often not sustainable because the overall benefit is for White Americans or the dominant culture with limited benefits for African Americans.

It is important to recognize that the goal of graduation may not be definitive of success for some students. Attending to and including the multiple needs of a diverse student population is necessary for a holistic definition of success. Kuh et al. (2006) defined student success as academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post-college performance. Additionally, an examination of the rates of success specifically for African American males in the community college setting is warranted for an amended definition of success.

Rates of success. Underrepresented students, specifically African American males in higher education, have been characterized by poor retention and degree attainment rates (Wood & Turner, 2011). According to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) survey from 2006, Black[3], non-Hispanic male students had the lowest three-year graduation rate, 16%, among all minority male community college students. However, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2006) African American males persist at rates comparable to white and Hispanic/Latino males in their first year in community college. The rate of degree attainment for African American males is lower than White and Hispanic/Latino males, and categorizes them as being unsuccessful in their pursuit of higher education. There is some discrepancy in terms of defining a successful community college student. Based on the IPEDS data, success is defined by graduation rates and therefore African American males are unsuccessful in their pursuit of higher education. Yet, data from the Department of Education defines success as persisting and by this definition, African American males in community college are successful. These perspectives of success are confusing and do not address the experiences of African American males in their quest for success in higher education.

Many scholars have noted the lack of academic success in higher education for African American males (Esters & Mosby 2007; Hughes, 2010; Nan & Zia, 2011; Perrakis, 2008; Turner, 2011). African American males in higher education have been characterized by their poor persistence, retention, and degree attainment rates (Turner,

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[3] For the purposes of this study African American and Black are used interchangeably.

2011). Yet, when examining one-year persistence rates for Black males, it is comparable

to that of White and Hispanic males. Black males persist at a rate of 73.6% in their first

year of college while White males persist at 74.7%, and Hispanic males persist at 76.9%

(U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Nevertheless, Esters and Mosby (2007) found that

Black males have the lowest graduation rate among all males in community college.

Currently in the U.S., 30.3% of African-Americans between the ages of 25 to 34 have

attained an associate's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Based on data from

the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 16% of African American

males graduate from two-year colleges in three years.

     In addition to poor graduate rates, Black males are also reported to have the

lowest grade point average (GPA) of all male students attending community college.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2006) Black males have an average

GPA of 2.64 compared to the GPA of White males at 2.90, Hispanic/Latino males at 2.75

and Asian males at 2.84. Information on Native American males' GPA was not found.

Despite these numbers, Perrakis (2008) examined the results of over 4,000 surveys

distributed to students within the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD).

Black males comprised 4.2 % of the total sample and while White males were 6.1% of

the total sample. Course completion and GPA were the measures of success. Perrakis

(2008) concluded that African American males in community college persist at the same

rates as their counterparts with the only measurable difference in success being a lack of

academic preparation and performance. Academic preparation and performance were

related to the completion of a calculus class. Although the study focused on community

college students, it did not examine or capture the voices of African American males or White males as it correlates to their perceived notions of success in their experiences in community college.

       Constructed cultural and social identity. Oyserman and Oliver (2008) developed an extensive review of literature tracing the theoretical development of racial and ethnic identity. Starting with the 1890 work of psychologist William James and his theory of self-concept, Oyserman and Oliver examined theoretical considerations of race identity and ethnic identity. Based on their review of the literature, Oyserman and Oliver defined racial and ethnic identity in three basic components: membership, beliefs, and action readiness. Membership refers to the knowledge one has about being a part of an ethnic and racial group. The component of belief addresses how the group members believe they fit into the broader realm of society, how they should act, how they develop goals and values, and what strategies they use to attain these goals. Action readiness pertains to the ways in which group members act or behave that is congruent with their beliefs about belonging to the group. It is noted that race and ethnicity are social constructs, meaning they are based on social agreements to categorize individuals. For the purposes of defining racial and ethnic identity, Oyserman and Oliver used the concepts together. Understanding race and ethnicity as part of one's self-concept and the social meanings carried with this understanding is useful in making sense of oneself and one's experiences with others (Oyserman & Oliver, 2008). Their research primarily examined racial and ethnic identity from a historical perspective that focused on the development of children, adolescence, and early adulthood. However, the development of

racial and ethnic identity beyond early college years was not examined.

When African American males enter higher education institutions, many find themselves in an environment that forces them to choose between cultural identities, which causes conflict and stress (Lewis, 2010). Addressing traditional and historical academic settings, Owen (2010) reminded us that White men have decision-making authority and their values are infused in the institution. This authority creates an academic culture where "the institution becomes structured and shaped to serve the purposes of White men" (Owen, 2009. p 192). In this environment, African American males seeking success in higher education find themselves straddling two cultures; their original culture and a culture designed for White males by White males. The results of a study conducted by Collins-Eaglin and Karabenick (1993) about attitudes towards success revealed that African American students equated achieving academic success as "selling out" and "acting White." In contrast to acting White or selling out as developed academic identities, Peterson-Lewis and Bratton (2004) examined the concept of "acting Black" in educational settings. Within the discussion of constructed social and cultural identities as well as self -presentation of African American males in academic settings were the concepts of "Joe Cool" and hyper-masculinity. Furthermore, researchers have found that negative social imagery of African American males has an impact on their constructed identity as academically successful (Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012).

Acting White. Attempts to fit in with dominant culture by trying to be more like them, that is "acting White," as defined by Ogbu (1992) from the perspective African Americans. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggested that in order for African American

males to feel like they can be successful in education they must abandon their cultural identity and develop the identity of the dominant culture or "act White." Kunjufu (1988) reported that African American boys in primary and secondary schools are forced by their peers to choose between being popular (acting cool) and being smart (acting White). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) claimed that these social pressures are often rooted in the belief that school achievement is characteristic of White students, not African Americans. As such, high-achieving African American students are often accused of "acting White." However, it is not the ability to achieve and perform well academically that is deemed challenging for African American students. Ogbu and Simons (1998) reported that African American students are generally supportive of their same-race peers when they achieve (i.e. earn good grades); it was the embracing of perceivably White attitudes and behaviors used to earn those grades that are deemed problematic.

African American students have equated academic success with "selling out" (Collins-Eaglin & Karabenick, 1993). In opposition to the demand to behave more like the dominant culture, African Americans, particularly males, choose to resist and behave academically in ways that are not conducive to succeeding in education or counter to the dominant culture. In exploring a counter perspective, the notions of "acting Black," "Joe Cool," and hypermasculinity were addressed in the literature. Other researchers have noted that stereotypes and negative imagery that African American males encounter were linked to their unsuccessful performance in education (hooks, 2004; Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry 2012; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Steele, 1997).

Acting Black. In an attempt to explain the gap in academic achievement between

African American and White youth, Steinberg (1996) and Jencks and Phillips (1998)

contended that many Black youths' presumption that academic success is incompatible

with Black identity.   Thus, academic achievement by African Americans is perceived as

"acting White," or behavior that reflects the desire to fit in with White culture. So much

attention has been given to this phenomenon that researchers have questioned, if

academic achievement is synonymous to acting White, then what does it mean to "act

Black" in academic arenas?

Peterson–Lewis and Bratton (2004) interviewed sixty-four 16-17 year-old African

American' high school students (41 females and 23 males) representing 17 of the 22

public high schools in a large northeastern urban city and asked what does it mean to act

Black. Each respondent provided multiple descriptions for "acting Black." The

descriptions were grouped by similarity and placed into categories that reflected the

description of the content. Peterson-Lewis and Bratton (2004, p. 85) listed the following

categories and descriptions that emerged from the interviews:

(1)*Academic/Scholastic*: Education or school-related qualities or dynamics;

(2)*Aesthetic/Stylistic:* Attire, style, or leisure-related qualities or activities. This

category also includes behaviors if those behaviors reflect aesthetic practices such

as wearing a particular style or engaging in a particular pastime;

(3*) Behavioral:* Concrete, specific acts or activities—except for style-related

actions, which are grouped in the aesthetic/stylistic dimension;

(4) *Dispositional*: Qualities that reflect intentions, motives, values, philosophies,

and worldviews that may underlie, motivate, or inform behavior.

(5)*Impressionistic:* The overall impression, image, or effect that one projects

A significant and critical pattern in data was that almost all of the descriptions for acting Black were negative. For example, some responses under the category academic/scholastic are:

"Not going to class" "Not doing school work" "[Acting] street-smart instead of school-smart"[Trying] to impress [peers] rather than doing what is necessary to achieve"(brackets by authors for clarification, Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004, p. 86).

The African American students, male and female, interviewed for this study associated "acting Black" with qualities that predict academic failure. These responses suggested that high achieving Black students who behave in ways that qualify as "acting Black" will likely experience achievement dissonance. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) defined achievement dissonance as the sense that achievements are racially inappropriate.

Cook and Ludwig (1998) argued that high academic achievers experience peer ostracism. White students get labeled as "nerds," and Black students get labeled as "acting White". This was not to suggest that the ostracism experienced by both groups of students is similar or weighted equally – they are substantially different. "Nerd" is a social label and does not suggest that a White student's achievement is "racially inappropriate." "Acting White," when applied to a Black students, suggested that academic achievement is grounded in race. Peterson-Lewis and Bratton (2004) noted that this label:

…problematizes academic achievement by racializing it, thereby converting achievement into a racial affront, and the Black achiever into a race offender. The label "acting White" pits Black achievers' personal ambitions against their racial identity and leaves them with two primary strategies for resolving the conflict: (a) they must either lower their personal achievement ambitions or (b) discontinue identification and/or association with other Blacks. (p.88)

This study did not include the voices and perspectives of African American students enrolled in community college or universities. However it is noted that outside of the study, some college students were asked in an informal setting what it means to "act Black," and the responses were similar to those of the participants in the study.

Joe Cool and Hypermasculinity. Masculinity is generally perceived as a positive with characteristics of strength, power, assertiveness, and social attraction. Children learn early what behaviors are expected and acceptable from boys and girls. Adler, Kless, and Adler (1992) found that young boys gained popularity in the classroom by exhibiting stereotypical masculine behaviors, such as "being tough" and "standing up to their teachers." They also observed that when boys demonstrated stereotypical feminine behaviors, such as "sitting quietly" and "following directions," characteristics of being a "good" student, these boys were harassed and called names. Boys were stigmatized and labeled "nerds" if they were perceived to perform "too well" in school. Thus boys made concerted efforts to conceal their ability to achieve by displaying a "masculine posture" and participating in a "culture of coolness" to avoid the stigma of being a nerd.

Majors and Billson (1992) referred to the "masculine posture" as "cool pose" to specifically describe African American males' self-presentation in academic settings. The "cool pose" is a presentation of hypermasculinity. Hypermasculinity is a masculine

phenomenon that is continually reinforced in a "feedback loop of social rewards and reinforcements" (Czoop, Lasane, Sweigard, Bradshaw, & Hammer, 1998, p. 283). This presentation style represented a social declaration of masculinity and provided the actor with the social rewards of its role. Male students that posture and pose are judged as more masculine than other males and are perceived to be more popular, more attractive, and more socially confident. The "hypermasculine" style of presentation allows Black males to maintain a sense of control, strength, self- confidence, and pride in a racially discriminatory society. Additionally, this style of self-presentation supports the notion of not performing well in school because that would be perceived as less than masculine.

Czopp et al (1988) investigated the relationship between the social perceptions of a masculine student and his racial background specifically addressing the "cool pose". One hundred and seventy –six college undergrads completed a questionnaire responding to four vignettes regarding a student named "Joe" as a cool Black male, a cool White male, a non-hypermasculine Black male, and a non-hypermasculine White male. An ANOVA analysis indicated that "Joe Cool" was perceived to be more masculine and less feminine than non-hypermasculine "Joe." Joe Cool was also favored more socially and perceived to enjoy school less. Thus a presentation of hypermasculinity, a masculine posture, or a cool pose in higher education is associated academic indifference, academic deficiency, and social attractiveness. Male students learn early that to be considered socially attractive they should conceal their academic achievement and present a hypermasculine stereotypical posture or pose of cool.

Stereotype Threat. Steele (1997) proposed the theory of Stereotype Threat to explain how the identity of African American males is challenged in academic environments. Stereotype threat refers to how individuals cope with unflattering stereotypes about their groups, focusing on stereotypes that allege intellectual inferiority (Aronsom, 2004) and helps shape the academic identity of students. Acknowledging membership in a stereotyped social group can affect academic performance, which often results in shifting performance in the direction of the stereotype. In a recent study, Taylor and Walton (2011) investigated whether or not stereotype threat impedes the process of learning. Seventy-six college students, 30 of which were identified as Black, participated in experiments to determine if stereotype threat interfered with learning and performing. The results of the study "provided direct evidence that stereotype threat undermines academic learning" (Taylor & Walton, 2011, p. 1064). Students, e.g., African American males, experiencing stereotype threat may not pursue the same learning opportunities as White males and thus may not experience success.

Tinto (1993) also provided insight into culture and identity development associated with success in higher education with his theory of student departure. Tinto's theory posits a three- part design to expose student persistence: separation, transition, and integration. Separation refers to the physical and emotional disconnection from the life prior to becoming a student in higher education. After separating from the life prior to entering the realm of higher education, the student will enter the transition phase. During the transition phase the student is acquainted with the expectations and social norms, values, and habits of college life. The final stage of the process is integration where the

student is thoroughly engaged in the institution and recognized as a full member of the college community. Tinto (1993) wrote that attending college "requires individuals to disassociate themselves from …the family" (p. 95). He suggested that attending college requires adapting a new culture and new identity. At this point, the student understands and behaves as a member of the academic culture, thus developing a multicultural background and identity. Based on Tinto's theory, an African American student would need to juggle and balance at least three cultural identities: their native culture, the dominant culture, and the culture of higher education. African American males' conceptions of success may reveal that the labels attached to them, in terms of lack of success, are misdirected and serve to fulfill a prophecy of failure in higher education.

   Summary. Cultural and social identity has been explored as ways to explain behaviors in academic settings that are attributed to race and ethnicity. Research specifically attributed to African American males in higher education addressed phenomena of the pressure to Act White, Act Black and display hypermasculinity traits as social and cultural constructed identities needed to succeed to in academia. Stereotypes associated with these identities create challenging environments for African American males to succeed in higher education.

   Barriers to success. Academic and social engagement has been identified in the literature as key components of student success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1995). According to the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE, 2008), the more students are actively engaged with the college, the more likely they are to attain their educational goals. Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges and Hayek (2006) explain that in

college, students of color often experience challenges based on cultural perceptions that make it difficult for them to engage in the resources available for learning and personal development. Moreover, men of color in college often identify as self -reliant and this identity may impeded their ability to fully engage in college and thus difficult to accomplish their academic goals (Gardenhire, Collado, Martin, & Castro, 2010). Existing research has identified cultural barriers to engagement for students of color, yet their voices in this area are not represented in the literature.

Another theme prevalent in the literature is the theoretical framework of Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory (CRT) to examine the barriers to success experienced by African Americans in education. Critical theory provided the conceptual lens for an examination of concepts of success. A foundational component of Critical Theory is that meaning is unstable and should be focused on local or personal expressions rather than large generalizations. Understanding the lived experience of "real people" in context is necessary for uncovering hidden ideology and viewpoints that veil power and privilege.

Within the Critical Theory framework rests Critical Race Theory (CRT). These two theoretical frameworks are particularly useful for examining African American males' conceptions of success. The first premise of CRT is that racism is normal in American society; it looks "ordinary and natural to persons in the culture" (Delgado & Stefanic, 1999, p. xvi). A second premise of CRT, developed by Derrick Bell (as cited in Delgado & Stefanic, 1999), suggests that a "culture constructs its own reality in ways to promote its own self –interest" (p.xvii). Therefore analyzing the concept of success at it operates in the culture of the community college is important because based on CRT it

is perceived to promote and support the success of White males, the traditional student body. A final premise of CRT holds that racial advances for African Americans will be tolerated and encouraged only when the "advances also promote white self-interest", (Delgado & Stefancic, 1999, p.xvii).

Stereotype threat as posed by Steele and Aronson (1995) revealed that African Americans in college performed poorly on standardized test when race was emphasized. Steele and Aronson (1995) concluded that academic performance could be harmed by the knowledge that one's behavior might be viewed through the lens of racial stereotypes. Subsequent research has demonstrated other consequences of being consistently exposed to stereotype threat. Some reported consequences are underachievement in academic tasks (Stone & McWhinnie, 2008), a reduced sense of belonging to the stereotyped domain, i.e. higher education, (Osborne, 2007), and a limited choice of professions (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat may contribute to academic and social inequality.

Closson (2010) traced the development of CRT and included it in an examination of literature related to education attainment of African Americans. The tenets of CRT have been utilized to examine challenges and barriers to academic success specifically for African Americans in higher education (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010; Carter, 2008; Closson, 2010; Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2010; Palmer & Maramba, 2011). Some of the identified barriers are lack of safe spaces, experiencing microaggressions, and counter stories.

Carter (2008) examined how the development of a critical race consciousness illuminates students' attitudes about race and racism, achievement, and the utility of schooling for upward mobility. Critical race consciousness is defined as "a critical understanding of the asymmetrical power relationships that exist between Blacks and Whites in America" (p. 102). Using Oyserman's African American Identity Schema and Critical Race Theory as theoretical frameworks, Carter (2008) found that "when students possess a critical race consciousness, they demonstrate an awareness and understanding of race as a potential barrier to their schooling and life success" (p. 14).

More commonly reported in the literature are the historical and cultural factors that create barriers, which are systematically designed to prevent African Americans, and any other minority group, from succeeding in education. Racism and oppression are historical components of education experienced by African Americans that are still prevalent today. Expressions of racism, however subtle, are well established in policies and practices in higher education. African American males and other men of color have reported experiencing prejudice and stereotypes regularly from college faculty and personnel, which they attributed to their race/ethnicity and gender (Gardenhire-Crooks, Collado, Castro, Brock & Orr, 2010). These men expressed feeling unwelcomed due to cultural, racial or ethnic indicators of their appearance (e.g. braided hair, tattoos and baggy pants) and believed that faculty made negative judgments about their academic abilities based on these factors.

Support factors. Social and institutional systems of support are factors essential to the academic success of African American males. Positive support in the home and

among peers (Kincaid & Jianju, 2011; Nan & Zia, 2011) has been reported as critical to

the success of African American males in higher education. Additionally, support

services and special counseling skills in the student services area of higher education

(Hughes, 2010; Owens, Lacey, Rawls & Holbert-Quince, 2010) were identified as

necessary components that contribute to the persistence and success of African American

males. Wood and Turner (2011) reported that professional and personal support systems

help shape attitudes about schooling and encourage decisions and behaviors that result in

success. Furthermore, Hall (1999) through quantitative research found that beyond

campus climate and environmental factors impeding and contributing to success, first

semester grade point averages were the main determinant of retention for African

American students in higher education.

A significant body of research published by Guiffrida in 2005, challenged Tinto's

theory of student departure. Guiffrida (2005) investigated the impact of families on the

academic success of high and low achieving Black students. He found that families

indeed played a critical role in the success of Black students by providing academic,

emotional and financial support. These findings confirm the importance of staying

connected to the family, which is in direct opposition to Tinto's theory. Palmer, Davis

and Maramba (2011) sought to build on Guiffrida's study by expanding the studied

population to include students attending HBCUs. Guiffrida (2005) limited his study to

Black students attending predominantly White institutions. Even in the racially

supportive environment of an HBCU, Palmer et al (2011) found that the challenge to

Tinto's theory was upheld. Family support, in the way of role modeling the pursuit of

education beyond the attainment of a baccalaureate degree and sharing knowledge of their educational experiences, was integral to the promotion of academic success for their students (Palmer et al., 2011).

Support factors address success outside of the student, meaning they generally reflect the environment and institutional structures in place to promote success. These structures do not point to how individuals define success, nor do they illuminate the differences in how success is perceived by African American males or White males in community college.

The experiences of African American males in higher education have been explored from multiple perspectives. Their success in higher education or lack thereof has been attributed to many determinants. Factors promoting success from the perspective of African American males in college have been reported. Dynamics from within the institution, e.g., faculty-student relationships (Millane, 2011; Nan & Zia, 2010; Wood & Turner, 2011;Wood, 2010) campus culture and climate (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010; Harper, 2006; Maxwell & Shammas, 2007; Museus & Harris, 2010; Museus, 2011) and student services resources (Davis & Palmer, 2011; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Owens, Lacey, Rawls & Holbert-Quince, 2010) have been captured in the literature as being a significant causal factor in the academic success of African American males. Family, racial identity and community are the aspects most reported as influencing success outside of institutional dynamics (Carter 2008; Harper, 2006; Lewis, 2010; Tatum, 2004; Wood, 2010; Witherspoon, 2011). African American males reported these factors at every stage of their academic career as influencing their success however; the

conceptualization of success by African American male students has not been closely
examined.

Models of success. Wirth and Padilla (2008) build a model of student success by
examining student experiences and the perceived obstacles or barriers that are
specifically located in the community college, which prevent access to the institutional
culture of success. Using Padilla's theoretical framework for designing models of student
success, the researchers developed a qualitative approach to examine campus barriers and
how to overcome them. The study had 22 volunteer participants from a community
college in south Texas. Participants were placed in three small groups and asked to
complete a matrix. The responses of three groups were collected and created the final
matrix. Identified barriers to success were placed in six categories: personal; financial;
course work; learning; institutional; and student support. Institutional barriers were noted
most frequently and financial barriers the least frequent. The knowledge needed to
overcome the barriers was identified as experiential knowledge; knowledge about
studying and study skills; relational knowledge; and motivational knowledge.

Acknowledging the challenge of success in higher education for African
American males, many researchers and educators have developed models for success.
Wood (2010) examined factors that affect the academic success of African American
males in community college. From a series of in-depth interviews with students, faculty
members and administrators, Wood (2010) developed a model of success based on
institutional support and faculty engagement as ways of encouraging and supporting
student success. Additionally he noted that they needed to be held accountable for

improving their study habits, attendance, and use of academic support services and resources. Although Wood (2010) addressed African American males in community college, his study was limited to a small sample, 28 students at a single institution with low enrollment of African American students.

Gutierrez and Dantes (2009) created a comprehensive model of student success. The Community College of Chicago (CCC) developed a six-year longitudinal study focused on student driven outcomes as a measure of success. The project had two main purposes: document and analyze student outcome and assess the impact of demographic, socioeconomic and academic factors on student outcomes. A selected cohort of 7,410 new credit students was tracked for six years in CCC's service district. A two-step binary regression analysis was used to assess the impact of demographic, socioeconomic, and academic variables on retention, graduation, transfer, baccalaureate degree attainment, and successful course completion. Gutierrez and Dantes found that 63.6% of CCC students completed one positive outcome after six years. These findings suggested that student outcomes are a better indicator of student success than graduation rates, which at CCC is reported to be less than 10%. The authors reported that a comprehensive model of student outcomes is a more accurate depiction of student success than quantifiable graduation rates.

Summary

As more African American males enroll in community colleges and more pressure from policy makers is applied to increase student success rates, defining and

measuring the construct of student success is imperative. Criticism of student success definitions argue that outcomes other than quantitative indicators are needed to accurately and inclusively engage in transformational discussions related to student success. The quantitative approach to student success ignores the student perspective and voice as it relates to student success.

Private organizations such as the Lumina Foundation provided funding for postsecondary education institutional initiatives and programs, such as Achieving the Dream, that are concerned with increasing graduation rates as a model of student success. The published rates of success for African American males in community college indicate that this population is lagging behind their White and Latino/Hispanic counterparts. An examination of why these students achieve success at such low rates is warranted. Is it possible that African American males are defining success differently than their counterparts and thus are not benefitting from available programs and policies intended to promote success? Addressing student success from the perspective of the students can provide reasons for the low rates and offer solutions to this problem.

The discouraging rates of success for African American males in higher education have been addressed through multiple theoretical frameworks. Constructed cultural and social identities in relation to persisting in higher education as well as barriers to success have been explored in the literature. Acting White, acting Black, coolness and hypermasculinity have been attributed to academic performance and perceptions of African American students. Critical Race Theory, Stereotype Threat, and Critical Race Consciousness have been applied to the experience of African American males to provide

an explanation of the challenges they face in pursuit of an academic career. Critical Theory, CRT, and Stereotype Threat allow for the interpretation of the symbols used in the culture of higher education, more specifically the culture of community colleges, in order to understand the ways in which various social groups are oppressed. In order to change oppressive forces, there is an obligation to understand the ways in which oppression is occurring. Critical theories inquire about the ways in which competing interests collide and the style in which conflicts as a result of the collision are resolved that often favor particular groups. The symbolism of success as presented in the culture of community colleges can systematically disenfranchise African American males.

Although some qualitative research has been produced on student success, most is rooted in Tinto's theory of integration, which proposes that students must sever their connections and identity with past relationships, i.e., their culture, in order to successfully persist in higher education. Yet, these frameworks do not consider the conception of success from the perspective of the African American male community college student.

Institutional and personal support factors that affect student success have been researched as a means to developing models of success. Multiple models and measures of student success grounded in several theoretical perspectives have been implemented with inconsistent results. Further examination of persistence and the creation of relationships with a focus on the diversity of student populations are needed as well as critiques of existing models.

The literature presents multiple terms, definitions, perspectives, and models of student success however new definitions that include qualitative measures such as student

perspectives on barriers to success are emerging. The need for community colleges to be more inclusive of their diverse student populations will drive the framework for the development of new programs and models for student success. Researchers, policy makers, and educators will be required to create and use measures that address and identify multiple dimensions and constructs of student success including socioeconomic status, age, and ethnicity and individual perspective to contribute to a better understanding of student success. Additionally, more effort is needed in collecting and aligning the student perception of success with the models implemented and supported by institutions.

Much of the existing research regarding success and African American males in higher education focuses on their experiences in four-year institutions. This body of literature tends to address the reasons why African American males are not succeeding. Some of the published work that has explored student success as it relates to African American males in post-secondary education suggested that African American males succeeding in higher education were exceptions to the rule. In light of the attention given to African American males in higher education, very little research exists that examines the experience of African American males in community college. Additionally, the nature of student success as perceived by African American males in community college is limited in literature. This study was poised to capture the voice of African American males in community college in order to research and enhance the understanding of how they conceptualize success.

CHAPTER 3
DESIGN AND METHODS

Current initiatives in post-secondary education call for a significant increase in the percentage of community college graduates by year 2025. African American males have been identified as a group of students with extremely low rates of success in the community college. In order to move these students towards higher rates of success and completion, it is imperative to capture success from their perspective and gain an understanding of how policies, programs, and practices in community colleges can better serve these students. The purpose of this study is to examine the concept of student success from the perspective of African American males in community college. For the purposes of this study the generally accepted institutional definition of success is grounded in the Completion Agenda (McPhail, 2011), which defined success as certificate or degree attainment or transfer to university.

The methods of research used to examine student success as defined by African American males enrolled in community college are outlined in this chapter. This chapter provides an overview of research questions, key attributes on research design, participants, data collection method, data analysis, and the limitations of the study. A brief discussion of the project's timeline and efforts to protect the confidentiality of data are also part of this chapter. Special attention is given to the unique issues involved with researching ethno-cultural groups in the context of a postsecondary education environment.

Research Question

The primary research questions forming the focus for this study are:

1. What is the concept of success held by African American males while pursuing their academic goals in community college?

2. What institutional factors contribute to their concept of success?

3. What non-institutional factors contribute to their concept of success?

Capturing how African American males perceive success lends their voice to the discourse on student success. The voice component of Critical Race Theory provides a way to communicate experiences and realties of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) noted that naming one's reality or supplying one's voice is central to understanding the role of race in education. Delpit (1988) argued that a tragedy of education is the silencing of the voice of people of color. Delgado (1989) suggested three reasons for naming one's own reality and telling one's story:

1. reality is socially constructed;

2. stories provide a way for self-preservation; and

3. the exchange of stories from teller to listener can help overcome ethnocentrism and viewing the world in one way

African American males' concept of student success in their voice sheds light on their reality and can provide insight as to the best way to serve these students.

Positionality

As an educator in the community college system, I am aware of indicators of success that often go unnoticed and are not addressed in institutional programs, practices, or policies. For example, Gardenhire et al (2010) identified achieving respect from faculty, staff, and other students as an identified marker of success for male students of color. Additionally, Kuh et al (2006) acknowledged that the ability to financially support the family and successfully balancing work and school as measures of success. For example, the ability to get homework finished before leaving campus to go to work. These are indicators of success that are not measured by certificate or degree attainment.

Also, as an African American woman, I am aware that academic policies and practices are not always crafted or delivered with the perspectives of students of color in mind. Yet, these students are expected to internalize the voice of the dominant culture in order to be considered successful in higher education. In fact, past research, suggested that students of color did not persist in higher education because they failed to abandon their culture and integrate into campus culture (Tinto, 1993). As an African American scholar and educator, I have also experienced this push to disconnect from my cultural heritage and silence my voice in order to be perceived as a successful leader in higher education and in my journey to attaining my educational goals. I recall as an undergraduate and graduate student abandoning my perspective and silencing my voice when I wanted to contribute to a discussion in my predominantly White college class in order to fit in, earn the respect of my White professors, and not feel like a failure. Many times during my academic career I attempted to integrate my lived experience, as an

African American, into my schoolwork, only to be met with disagreement and rejection, and the desire to leave college.

Philosophical Approach

This study is directed through the lens of a critical approach. Merriam (2009) wrote, "those who engage in critical research frame their research questions in terms of power-who has it, how it's negotiated, what structures in society reinforce the current distribution of power" (p. 10). The educational system has a linear and narrow definition of student success. According to the Completion Agenda (McPhail, 2011) a community college student is deemed successful by meeting the standards of attaining a certificate, degree or transferring to a university in three years or less (College Board, 2010). This definition ignores other ways of experiencing student success. Yet, with the Completion Agenda (McPhail, 2011) guiding student success policies, programs, and practices in postsecondary education, students that do not share this ideal of success are perceived as non-achievers, at risk, non-completers, and unsuccessful in their academic journey. Paulo Freire (2000) explained that "One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding" (p. 95). Examining student success from the perspective of African American male students empowers them to assert their voice that has been traditionally silenced and to define their reality, which is generally ignored. This study does not suggest that one definition of student success is more correct than another; it is designed

to illuminate that more than one reality and way of experiencing student success exists and is experienced.

Guiding Theoretical Perspective

Critical Race Theory (CRT), Stereotype Threat and African American Male Theory (AAMT) are theoretical guides for this study. These theories and concepts will be explained in the following paragraphs.

Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is a theoretical framework and movement that is politically committed to examining contemporary social structures, thoughts, and principles with a focus on highlighting their role in the construction and maintenance of social domination and subordination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado and Crenshaw (1993) presented six tenets of CRT:

1. Critical Race Theory recognizes that racism is endemic to American life.

2. Critical Race Theory expresses skepticism towards dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy.

3. Critical Race Theory challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis.

4. Critical Race Theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin in analyzing law and society.

5. Critical Race Theory is interdisciplinary

6. Critical Race Theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all oppression (p. 6).

CRT recognizes that racism is endemic to American life.

Examining rates of student success, men of color are succeeding at rates far below their White counterparts. When success is defined in the context of education, the history of the educational system cannot be ignored. Certificate and degree attainment or transferring to a university is a concept of student success that reflects a "normal" or common sense approach to education. What is normal or common tend to reflect the identity and reality of White males. Owen (2009) suggested that "when White men have this decision-making authority, their racial- and gender-specific interests, needs, and values can infuse the institution. In these often-subtle ways, the institution becomes structured and shaped to serve the purposes of White men", (p 192). The institutional definition of student success may serve to advantage White males and disadvantage men of color.

CRT expresses skepticism towards dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy.

A foundational component of Critical Theory is that meaning is unstable and should be focused on local or personal expressions rather than large generalizations. CRT asserts that social reality is constructed in the creation and sharing of stories about specific situations. Examining student success from the perspective of African American males provides a space for their voice, their experience, their stories, and their reality while challenging the status quo of the grand narrative, which is grounded in meritocracy and a position of privilege. Often stories of educational success follow the reasoning that everyone who works hard can attain power and privilege and ignore the inequality of

institutional racism. This reasoning implies that the system of education is neutral. Yet, African American males in community college or any stage of higher education begin their pursuit of education from a disadvantaged position in the areas of previous education, socioeconomic status, and race. Hence, their relationship and "truth" with academic success is different from that of White males. Examining the truth of this difference can lend to transforming the way that institutions provide support for academic success through programs and policies.

Stereotype threat. Stereotype threat refers to being at risk of confirming, as a self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's social group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Steele and Aronson (1995) demonstrated in several experiments that Black students in college did not perform as well on standardized tests as White students when race was emphasized. However when race was not highlighted Black students performed better or equivalent to White students. Stereotype threat explains how academic performance can be compromised when an individual is aware that his or her behavior is viewed through the lens of racial stereotypes. Across the academic landscape of higher education, African American males are generally referred to as at-risk for failing, which implies an expectation; and when they succeed, those individuals are exceptions to the rule.

Everyone belongs to a group for which some stereotype exists. Research has shown that the academic performance of anyone can be harmed when the stereotype-based expectation of poor performance is invoked. The consequences of stereotype threat are decreased performance in academic domains (Steele & Aronson, 1995), increased use

of self- defeating behaviors (Stone, 2002), disengagement (Osborne & Walker, 2006), and altered professional aspirations (Steele, 1997). The more African American males are exposed to stereotype threats in academic context, the more harm is perpetrated on their academic performance.

  African American Male theory (AAMT). African American Male Theory is a theoretical framework that was introduced into the literature in 2013 by Bush and Bush. This meta-level theory was developed to understand the lives and lived experiences of Black men and boys. AAMT development is centered in men's studies literature and derives principles from African-centered Theory, Critical Race Theory and Womanist Theory. AAMT has six tenets:

1. The experiences of Black men are best analyzed using an ecological systems approach.

2. Being Black and male creates distinct and unique lived experiences and perceptions of reality.

3. The study of Black men and culture is inextricably linked to pre-colonial African culture.

4. Resilience and self-determination is innate to Black men.

5. The intersections of racism, classism and sexism have a profound effect on the lives of Black men.

6. Social justice should be the focus of research and practice dedicated to the lives of Black men.

With the development of AAMT, Bush and Bush (2013) reassert Ogbu's (1991) notion of "Acting White" as an example of the resilience of Black men in an academic environment. Ogbu (1991) professed that African American males feared being perceived as turning their backs on their own culture and embracing the White culture by aligning themselves with school and education. In essence, going to school and being educated was seen as "acting white." AAMT challenges the synonymous claim that education and schooling are the same for Black men. According to AAMT, Black men resist the oppression of schooling and not the nature education. For Black men, resisting the system of schooling yet continuing to support education is an example of innate resilience.

Data Sources and Description of Data

Data was collected primarily from students attending a large community college consisting of multiple campuses and learning centers in Oregon. This college is geographically close to the researcher and has a population of African American students that is desired for this study. Self -identified African American males currently enrolled in community college either part time or fulltime represent the unit of analysis for this study. African Americans are 10.3% of the total student population of this college, which equates to roughly 950 students (PNW Community College Fact Sheet).

Participants in this study were purposefully selected. In purposeful sampling, individuals and research sites are purposefully selected by the researcher to understand the phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 2012). Purposeful sampling is a method commonly used in qualitative studies. In a qualitative study, the goal in selecting

participants is not a random sample (Creswell, 2012), but a sample, which can contribute information that clarifies the scholarly structure of the research question. The point of saturation will determine the size of the sample. This form of sampling is best used when the purpose is to maximize information and sampling is terminated when no new information is obtained from new sample units (Merriam, 2009).

The sample population was recruited in a manner of convenience for participants in the study. Campus colleagues, i.e. faculty and multicultural center directors and program leaders, helped the researcher gain access to this population from invitations via publicly posted flyers, an advertisement in the campus newspaper, and recruitment. Sampling technique include convenience sampling where selected participants are accessible, available, and willing to take part in the study (Creswell, 2012). As an addition to convenience sampling, snowballing, asking identified subjects to invite similar subjects to participate in the study was also employed. To ensure maximum participation, flyers were posted for a month on bulletin boards across campus; an advertisement ran for a month in the student newspaper; and colleagues were asked to recruit students that met the study's criteria.

Data were collected via one-hour semi- structured one-on-one, face-to-face interviews. Scheduled interviews took place during winter and spring terms since the college is on a quarter system. Open-ended questions were posed to the participants so that they could "voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings", (Creswell, 2012, p. 218). Participants were incentivized with a cash gift of $10.00 for participation in the study.

Interview questions were developed by modifying existing interview questions in *African American male achievement; Using a tenet of critical theory to explain the African American male achievement disparity* by Palmer, Davis, and Maramba (2011). Palmer et al (2011) interviewed African American males, who were in their senior year, attending a four-year institution, more specifically a Historical Black College or University (HBCU). Their interview consisted of 20 questions, eight of which specifically address experiences at an HBCU. Since this study specifically addresses African American males in community college, those eight questions were not used in this study. The remaining questions address student success through the framework of CRT and stereotype threat experiences, which are germane to this study.

The open-ended interview questions presented in a semi-structured format are designed to capture the meaning of student success and the experience of success as it rests in three areas of CRT: Micro-aggressions, Counter-Stories, and Counter Spaces. Micro-aggressions are a type of subtle abuse aimed at minorities that can be visual, verbal, nonverbal, conscious, or unconscious (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010). Critical race theorists believe that an accumulation of experiences with micro-aggressions contributes to a marginalizing and oppressive environment. Counter-stories are grounded in the real life experiences of marginalized groups used to respond to and cast doubt on, in essence counter, existing myths and ideas of the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Counterspaces are also referred to as safe spaces and safe places. Safe spaces are venues that marginalized groups use to express their counter-stories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

The following are the sample interview questions:

1. What has life been like at this institution as a Black male?

2. How do you define success (academic and in general)?

3. How has that definition changed overtime?

4. How important is campus involvement to your academic success?

5. When Black men do not achieve academic success in college, what are the primary factors you think make it difficult to achieve success?

6. What are your experiences with student success programs on this campus?

7. What motivates you to do your best?

Analyses

This is a critical qualitative research engaging CRT and Stereotype threat to analyze personal accounts and narratives captured through interviews. Narratives, in education research, provide a voice for seldom- heard individuals (Creswell, 2012). Narrative inquiry explores a problem by understanding the experiences of individuals by emphasizing the importance of learning from participants (Creswell, 2012). Personal accounts are a form of narrative that asks research participants to share personal lived experiences. Stereotype threat experiences are best explored as personal accounts. The tenets of CRT are examined through the personal narratives of the study participants. African American males in community college may not be aware of CRT and thus will not tell of their experience. However, as an analytical tool, the researcher has been able to apply the identified tenets to the stories shared.

This study used constant comparative analyses on research notes and interview transcripts to identify recurring themes and topics. Constant comparative method "involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 30). This method is useful for interviews because it also allows the researcher to engage in the collection and analyses of data simultaneously to identify themes. Open coding, line-by-line analysis of transcribed interviews, and layering was used to identify themes that can be grouped into patterns.

Limitations

Limitations are perceived from many aspects of this study. Using interviews as method of data collection has disadvantages that can be presented as limitations. The participants may reveal what they believe the researcher wants to hear. Summarizing data through the lens of the researcher may result in a filtered perspective that represents the researcher more than the participants.

Race, oppression, and stereotypes in academic contexts are central to this study and the researcher has self- identified as an individual who has first-hand experience with these challenges. The resulting study could be dismissed due to the nature of the topic and the identity and history of the researcher. Another assumption related to race and oppression is that participants will be able to articulate their experiences in such a way that the knowledge gained will lend itself to the theoretical framework used to investigate their experiences.

Sample size is a limitation. The sample is taken from institutions in the region of the country where the African American population is less than 5% of the total population. Additionally, the institutions from which the participants were recruited have a small population of African American students. A small sample in a qualitative study does not allow for results to be generalized, and thus the results may be a snapshot of a unique group with a unique experience. However, other community colleges with small African American populations may take interest in the results of this study as they consider strategies to support African American students.

Strategies to Ensure Trustworthiness

In order to ensure trustworthiness, scrutiny thorough peer-review was employed. Feedback offered to the researcher over the duration of the project challenged assumptions made by the analyst. Lincoln and Guba (1985) expressed that opportunities for colleagues to analyze the project and provide feedback to the researcher are important because often the researcher's closeness to the project frequently inhibits a view of the project with real detachment. In addition the process of peer-review, reflective-commentary was also employed as a measure to ensure trustworthiness. Reflective commentary or monitoring the researcher's development of emerging patterns and the discussion of the project's effectiveness is critical in establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Protection of Human Subjects

      A review of the standards and processes for human subjects as study participants as required by the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at Oregon State University has been completed. Additionally, the researcher completed CITI training and received certification in June 2012, indicating knowledge of the processes required for the safety project participants. Study participants were presented with consent forms outlining confidentiality, study procedures, objectives, and the right to withdraw. Data collected will be stored for at least three years.

Timeline

      After initial contact with the institutions and gaining permission to access their student population, soliciting potential subjects for the study began. Three weeks were projected to complete this process. Data collection via interviews was estimated to conclude in 3-months allowing for scheduling and any unforeseen conflicts. Analysis of the data is the largest part of the project and was expected to continue for at least 7-months post collection. Therefore a roughly estimated time of project completion from initial institutional contact is 1-year.   The projected completion of the study was highly optimistic. Unaccounted for obstacles such as missed interview appointments, qualified participants recruiting unqualified participants via the snowballing technique, and colleagues, who were aiding in the recruitment of study subjects, changing jobs and moving out of state delayed the projected completion timeline for the study.

Summary of Methods

The research methods outlined in this chapter intend to demonstrate the research question for this study, the unit of analysis, and theoretical perspectives. The experiences of the researcher are discussed as well as the philosophical approach that informs the design of the study. Data sources and method of collection have been identified. African American males currently enrolled in community college were interviewed over the course of an academic year to explore their concept of student success and identify any threats based on stereotypes that hinder their academic performance. Limitations of the study are identified in data collection, data source and study design. Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness based on the limitations are also included as well as guidelines for the protection of the population being studied. Finally, a projected timeline of completion is noted.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This study explored the concept of success from the perspective of African American males enrolled in community college. The purpose of this research was to share the voice, narratives, and perspectives of African American males as it pertains to success. This chapter presents an overview of the data collection, a profile of the participants, findings from the interviews, and discusses the themes that emerged as they relate to the meaning of success as described by African American males in community college. The research design used qualitative semi-structured interviews with self – identified African American males enrolled in community college to address the following research questions:

1. What is the concept of success held by African American males while pursuing their academic goals in community college?

2. What institutional factors contribute to their concept of success?

3. What non- institutional factors contribute to their concept of success?

The theoretical framework found in Chapter 3 of the current study laid the foundation for constructing the research questions to help in the process of analyzing the participants' narratives. Appendix A contains the list of questions designed to align with the research questions.

Chapters one through three detailed information of the research study's purpose, literature reviewed and methods to support the current study. Chapter 1 provided summary relating to the problem statement and significance of the study. Chapter 2 provided a summary of the literature reviewed that identified multiple definitions of

success as it pertains to students in college as well as the factors related to the barriers

and achievement of success for African American males in higher education. Chapter 3

detailed the theoretical framework of the study along with the method for collecting data.

The chapter also included achievement of the validity and reliability within the research.

Chapter 4 relays the collected data and analyzed procedures used to result in the findings

related to the research interview as discussed within the research interview protocol,

contains an analysis of the interview transcripts to find the answers of the three research

questions presented in the study. The results of the analysis of the transcripts present data

as pertinent factors related to African American males' concept of success. The chapter

also concludes with a basic discussion of emerging themes and descriptions of the

participant's perceptions of success before providing an overall summary of the current

study. Chapter 5 will provide the current research conclusion based on the current

study's findings.

Overview of Data Collection Process

This study addressed how African American males in community college

conceptualize student success. The unit of analysis was the African American male

community college student enrolled in a community college in Oregon, therefore

excluding men from other identified ethnic groups and women. The American Council of

Education issued a report in 2010, which found that African American males had a

graduation rate of 35% over a six-year period. White males, in the same time period, had

a rate of 59%, Hispanic males had a rate of 46% and the rate for African American

women was 45 percent. African American males have the lowest rate of graduation

compared to White males, Hispanic males and African American women.

According to the College Board's Advocacy an Policy Center report "The Educational Experience of Young Men of Color: A Review of Research, Pathways and Progress" issued in 2010, 44.5 percent of African American males between 15-24 years of age were enrolled in a two-year or a four-year or a vocational school. Additionally, the College Board found that as of 2008, 28% of African American men had obtained an associate's degree or higher, while the figure for White males was 44% and 70% for Asian males. Only 16% of Latino males in this age group had obtained an associate's degree or higher.

Self -identified African American males, 18 years of age and older, currently enrolled in community college either fulltime, 12 or more credits per term, or part time, 11 to 6 credits per term, represent the unit of analysis for this study. The credit per term restrictions reflects the minimum number of credits required for full time and part-time enrollment status as well as the credit requirements to participate in all of the financial aid programs available for community college students in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. Therefore, students enrolled in 5 credits or less, are excluded from this study as well as students enrolled in non-credit courses only. The socio-economic status of the subjects is not part of the criteria for participation in the study.

Deans and faculty members of community colleges in the region with multiple campuses were contacted via email and asked to aid in the recruiting process for potential study subjects. Two deans, 3 faculty members and 2 directors of special programs responded to the email request. The directors of special programs were not primary contacts and were informed of the study by contacted faculty members. A flyer (see Appendix B) advertising the study and search for subjects were sent to the deans, faculty

members and program directors that responded to the email request. A second request to post the flyers was sent via email and 2 program directors associated with college's multicultural centers agreed to post the flyers at their campus and aid in recruitment.

Potential study subjects signed-up to participate in face-to-face interviews held on prescribed dates at predefined times in a private office on the college campus. Of the 12 research subjects, 8 initially qualified to participate in the study with one being disqualified after the start of interview process. Interviews were conducted between March and April 2015. Each subject was provided a verbal consent guide describing the purpose of the research and the voluntary nature of the interview process (see Appendix C). The interviews lasted between 35 minutes and 60 minutes each. The specific list of questions used in the interviews is included as Appendix E, though with most participants additional follow-up questions were added to elicit further detail and clarification from the subjects.

Audio recordings of the interviews were taken using an Olympus WS-802 Digital Recorder. The recordings were then transcribed by a professional transcription service and the transcripts were coded using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software: MAXQDAS 12. The coded excerpts were compared across all of the interviews in order to identify themes relevant to the primary research question. Eight descriptor fields were also developed to categorize the demographics and experiences of the participants. Additionally, the descriptor fields inform the most frequently used metrics for measuring student success in community college i.e., grade point average, persistence, and advancement – educational or occupational.

The identified codes and themes were shared with two colleagues, directors of multicultural centers at two different community colleges, to establish congruency of interpretations. Transcripts of the interviews, with any information identifying the participants or the community college they were attending was omitted and shared with my colleagues as a measure of validating the findings. This method of sharing qualitative data for trustworthiness is known as interrater reliability. Interrater reliability is the process of having two or more people independently analyze qualitative data and then compare findings (Roberts, 2010). The primary research question was used as a conceptual framework to analyze the data. The researcher found 7 common themes, patterns and categories while the center directors found six. The findings were the same 86 percent of the time.

Profile of Participants

Research indicates that African American males enrolled in community college tend to be characterized as non-traditional students based on age criteria (Wood & Palmer, 2015). The age range of participants was between 21 and 55 years old. Forty-three was the average age of the participants. Only one participant was characterized as a traditional student by age. The average time attending community college is two years, with the least amount of time recorded as 1.5 years and the most amount of time recorded as 5 years. Only one of the participants entered community college upon immediate completion of high school. The average grade point average of the participants was 3.32. Three of the participants were married, 6 had children, and 4 were employed. The following table (Table 3) summarizes the demographics, grade point average, major area

of study, and employment of the subjects who participated in interviews. Pseudonyms

were used to protect the identity of each participant. The names of colleges, cities, states

and unique programs and other factors that are uniquely linked to a participant have also

been changed.

Table 3
Summary Table of Subject Demographics, GPA, and Majors

Particip ant	Ag e	Marrie d	Childre n	Employ ed	GP A	Curren t Credits Enrolle d	Years attending Communi ty College	Major Area of Study
1 Taylor	21	NO	NO	YES	3.1 4	15	3	STEM
2 James	47	YES	YES	NO	3.6 0	12	1.5	Multi-Media Technolo gy
3 Anthony	52	YES	YES	YES	3.30	9	5	Business
4 Shawn	38	YES	YES	YES	3.70	8	3.5	Nursing
5 Preston	37	NO	YES	NO	3.07	12	2	Business
6 Derrick	54	NO	YES	YES	3.18	12	2	Human Services
7 Kevin	55	NO	YES	NO	3.25	14	4	Sociolog y

Community colleges are critical in providing access to higher education for

African American males. These particular students, Black men in community college, are

generally older, tend to be married, have children, and delayed their enrollment into post-

secondary education than their counterparts attending four-year institutions (Flowers,

2006). Most participants in this study, 6 out of 7 or 90% are over 35 years of age and

have children and none of the participants had earned a degree prior to completing the interview. Most participants delayed their entrance into higher education or returned to college after a long departure.

African American males face a number of issues, such as socioeconomic barriers, that make them vulnerable to crime and educational failure (Serpell, Hayling, Stevenson, & Kern, 2009). According to McMillian (2003), to improve their socioeconomic circumstances, African American males must see higher education as an opportunity for advancement and not a hindrance to their professional development. Participants selected for the current qualitative study are self-identified Black or African American males of U.S. citizenship between the ages of 18 and 45, to represent a general population of the college. The selected seven (7) participants were fluent in English and enrolled in more than six (6) credits at a community college. Each participant provided verbal consent to willingly participate in the study. The consent form (see Appendix C) was read to them and they obtained copies for their records.

Table 4 provides a brief description of the study participants. All participants were interviewed during the months of March – April 2015. Before beginning the interview questions, the researcher assured each participant that a pseudonym would be assigned to ensure confidentiality of their information and protect their identity throughout the data transcriptions. Demographic information (Table 3) was gathered prior to recording the interview. Table 4 highlights the personal narrative of each participant. It is imperative to humanize the participants, as their voice and reality are central to the framework of this study.

Table 4

Participant Description Table

Assigned Pseudonym	Program of Study	Brief Description of Participant
Taylor	STEM	Taylor is the youngest of the participants. A single-mother raised him and his older brother was shot and killed by the police. He is soft spoken and determined. Taylor has plans to transfer to the state university and study mechanical engineering.
James	Multi-Media Technology	James has recently entered college for the first time. He has been incarcerated and suffers from PTSD. He finds attending college therapeutic. He is currently interested in Arts and Technology yet has no plans to graduate.
Anthony	Business Administration	Anthony is one of 7 children raised by a single mother. Growing up he was "in and out of jail" and received negative messages from his grandmother when he was young. He started attending community college in 2010 and stopped out. He has returned to college to gain skills to succeed in business.
Shawn	Nursing	Shawn is a professional dancer and has traveled the world. Four years ago he decided to follow his mother into the nursing profession. Shawn has completed 3.5 years at the community college and has been accepted into a nursing program at a local university.
Preston	Business Administration	Preston entered community college after losing his job with the railroad. His mother suffered from mental illness and his father spent 32 years in prison. He spent time in foster care. He is a single parent to a young daughter.

Table 4 Continued

Derrick	Human Services	Derrick entered college after losing his business. His daughter was the first person in his family to graduate from college and he will be the first male in his family to earn a college degree. He received negative messages about education from his father. He views community college as a second chance to reinvent himself.
Kevin	Sociology	Kevin has a military background. He first attended community college in 1993 and returned 4 years ago after losing his job in manufacturing. He is majoring in sociology and would like to get a job on his campus.

Overview of Findings

Student success is a term that is closely aligned with higher education. More specifically, African American males have been the subjects of numerous studies seeking to find remedies for their lack of success in higher education (Harper, 2004). In this current study, seven African American male students attending community college were interviewed. The purpose of this study was to collect and share the concept of success as held by African American men in community college. The primary research question was "What is the concept of success held by African American males while pursuing their academic goals in community college?" To thoroughly examine the research topic, a secondary research question "What institutional factors contribute to their concept?" and a tertiary question "What non institutional factors contribute to their concept?" were developed. Based on these questions and the semi-structured interview questions, this researcher found that the participants in this study identified similar factors regarding barriers to and the achievement of success for African American males in higher education that exists in current literature on the subject. However, the definition of success, as proposed by study participants varies greatly from the traditional definition of success that is coveted by higher education.

Study participants' concept of success, included components of the traditional institutional definition of success, also highlighted and prioritized components and themes not considered in the traditional definition. To begin addressing the concept of success held by African American males, an exploration of the reasons African American males attend community college was examined. The major recurring themes that emerged regarding the concept of success included: experiences on campus, challenging racism and stereotypes, community and family support, financial status, and personal development.

Reasons for Attending College. For many Black students, community colleges help facilitate their access to postsecondary educational opportunities (Wood, 2011; Wood & Turner, 2011). Educational attainment or degree completion and academic achievement are two highly cited indicators of student success. Understanding why these African American men chose to attend community college sets the stage for their complex concept of success.

Interview Question - Describe why you are attending this institution.

Study participants consistently identified two primary reasons for attending college. These reasons were, social mobility and growing as an individual. Aligning with current literature, one participant in this study remarked that degree attainment and moving on to a university were primary reasons they chose to attend community college.

Social Mobility. Community college is also seen as a site for upward mobility in economic, social, and political arenas for African Americans (Bush, 2004). Social mobility is defined as a change or move in social and economic position overtime (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006). All the participants in this study made reference to

changing their economic status as a reason for going to college. For many African Americans educational attainment is the only way to gain social mobility. Some also included gaining a political voice as they moved "upward" in their socioeconomic status, while others saw going to college as a way to use their political voice as a way to "work on the system" instead of having the system work on them. Preston acknowledged, "The ultimate goal is to apply my degree…and be able to retire with my pension." Shawn, affirmed, "I wanted to have increased social mobility and I figured education [is] the fastest way for that. Derrick expressed that he is going back to school "to learn how to make better business decisions and more money."

Taylor, continues the pattern of social mobility as a reason to attend community college. He stated:

> The reason I'm attending this college here is because I feel like it's a great stepping stone in pursuing the goals I'm chasing after, the dreams I'm chasing….
>
> I think this institution is a perfect place to learn discipline. I don't think it's necessary to have it before you get here…[The] further you go up, the higher the expectations are, the more you're shaped.

Both Shawn and Taylor remark on change as movement for their social status that also represents their personal economic status. They see the institution as playing an integral part in shaping their futures, thus moving them to some place better than which they currently exist.

Individual Growth. Personal growth and development were identified as a reason for attending college. In terms of success, personal development, or as Chickering and Reiser (1993) defined "Identity Development" is the process of becoming comfortable

with oneself. Most participants relayed a sense of getting to know oneself better as they attended college. Statements that addressed past behaviors or knowledge of a past self and compared them to desired new behaviors characterized personal growth and development. For example, Derrick explained:

> I decided to go back to school and figure out what I did wrong and figure out how to do it right the next time and go back and do it again…I came back here to reinvent myself and, yeah, I did something wrong and that's why I'm here. Reinvent, do it all over again. It's like going back to the drawing board sort of saying… I want to reinvent me.

Another expression of personal growth as a reason for attending college was offered by Preston and he stated, "It was a blessing in disguise for me to go back to school and be able to identify what my strengths are. This is a place that you signed up for to challenge you to be stronger."

 James, who suffers from PTSD, has a reason for going to college that is not represented in current literature. Growth in his case is the literal act of moving through society to and being social:

> My reasoning [for attending] is just to get myself back into the swing of things…Back into a social setting because I lived as a hermit for a long time where I [stayed] to myself and to my family. I didn't venture off too far from home. If I went [out], I came right back. I didn't hang out with none of my friends or anything…College was going into the unknown for me. I was stepping out of my comfort zone. I thought I was comfortable letting my condition control me instead of working with my condition and getting it under control. That's what I've learned overall. I still have my issues, I still have my days, but those days are shorter now, they come far and few in between each other now compared to what it was like before.

There are many reasons to attend college. Yet the impression of being stuck in a certain

economic state or state of mind become compelling reasons to go to college, particularly

when higher education is perceived as a tool of advancement out of poverty.

Additionally, the social setting of college is perceived as a tool for getting unstuck.

Participants recognize the college has value in helping them move and grow from their

past to their desired future. Growth and movement indicate change and inform their

perception of success. Kevin simply stated, "I decided to get into college and see if I

could make a change in society."

Participants in this study also cited numerous other reasons for attending

community college. These reasons included location and affordability, personal growth,

gaining knowledge and setting an example for their children. Location was acknowledged

as a reason why participants chose the particular college they were attending, yet this was

not a primary reason. Casual statements such as, "it is the closest institution that I have to

my home," was the only indication that location was a factor for attending a specific

college. Additionally, acknowledging the financial cost of gaining a postsecondary

education was also addressed in a similar manner that deemed it not a primary reason for

attending college. Derrick noted, "I am attending this particular institution because it's in

the community. It's a community college and that's what I can afford to go to right now."

In alignment with the perspective of CRT and notion of changing the system or

institution Shawn also remarked:

> This particular college is affordable, it is close to my home and I think it's an
> opportunity for instructors to get a real perspective on what it is like for a Black
> man to be going back to college at a certain age in life because that's the culture
> we live in now, so not only does it benefit me as a student but, it benefits

> [instructors] to learn about people like me …so that they can better understand the
> community that they're trying to educate.

All of the participants acknowledged that they hoped their presence at the college would institute some form of change in the way the way that African American men were perceived on campus.

Reasons to attend community college are numerous yet, the participants in this study point to growth beyond academic advancement as their reason for attending. Reflecting on and gaining social mobility as well as a sense of growth and development are fundamental reasons for African American males to attend community college. Additionally, the desire to change the way African American males are perceived in higher education is constant undercurrent for attending community college. These reasons to attend are inextricably linked to a personal concept of success while attending community college.

Concept of Success

The following Table 5 represents Interview Protocol questions 1-3 that were asked to study participants as it relates to Research Question 1.

Table 5

Interview Protocol Question Outline for Research Question 1

Guiding Research Question	Interview Questions
R1: What is the concept of success held by African American males while pursuing their academic goals in community college?	1. Describe your definition of academic success 2. Describe your definition of success in general 3. Has your definition changed over time? If so, describe how has it changed and why has it changed?

Interview Question - Describe your definition of academic success.

Academic Success. Student success as defined in the realms of higher education sway towards quantitative outcomes. Measurable results in specific indicators of student success, e.g., persistence, educational attainment, and student advancement make up the traditional paradigm of success that all community college students are held to. This interview question addressed academic success by asking African American males to depict academic success based on their own perception and experiences. Participants described academic success based on overcoming challenges not based on academic performance. Most participants did not address grades or any quantifiable measures as academic success.

The recurring themes regarding academic achievement were:

 (1) *Motivation*. Understood as how participants expressed their willingness to accomplish academic goals

(2) *Acclimation*. Understood as how participants adapted in the academic environment

(3) *Racism*. Understood as overcoming challenges in the academic environment related to race not as a barrier to success,

(4) *Recognition.* Understood as participants being acknowledged for the academic work completed.

*Motivation***.** The willingness to accomplish academic goals was expressed by every participant. Derrick expressed, "Success academically, I think would be to achieve all my objectives and all of my goals." Shawn noted, "My personal academic success is

not only entering into academia but then having [a] goal and then completing that goal." The impetus for most participants in achieving academic success is the achievement or completion of a goal that is personal is to them. Taylor, the youngest participant, expressed academic success as "to overcome weakness…enhance your experience while you're alive."

Acclimation. Adjusting to the academic environment was also an important component of defining academic success. Most participants delayed entry into community college or returned after departing for a number of years. Based on their distant relationship with the academic environment some of the participants noted a negative image of themselves and their skill level. Preston remarked:

> My definition of academic success is not really great. I consider success as fully understanding the materials that's being presented to me. If I can fully understand my writing, if I can fully understand psychology, if I can fully understand the graphs in macroeconomics, then I've succeeded no matter what the grade it. I want to be able to understand information.

Anthony expressed his relationship with one subject as "Math would literally just reach in and it just takes a part of me and just rips it right on out". Becoming acclimated to the academic environment can require a change in perception of success. Anthony remarked that his original definition of success was very much the traditional definition, yet over time his definition changed:

> What I come to realize [is] that, I had to redefine my definition of what success was, and what that is for me now is making sure I try my best to come to class, to not make excuses, not to blame others, to seek out as much help as I can.

Although some participants struggled with acclimating to the academic environment, their concept of success centered on being able to adjust and persist regardless of their race.

Racism. Participants addressed race and racism in regards to academic success as overcoming challenges that are related to the environment of teaching of learning. More specifically, the participants acknowledged what they perceived as a "lack of cultural awareness" when interacting with faculty and White students. Kevin recalled a specific event:

> The instructor said, "Tell us something about African Americans," and one student remarked, "They are the lowest form of scum on the earth," and the instructor didn't address it. I got up took my stuff and left. I could have fit the stereotype by jumping up and going off on that kid [but] I didn't.

Encounters like this were either expressed directly or alluded to as race and racism were discussed. For all of the participants, being academically successful means knowing that you will encounter racist incidents in the classroom.

Recognition. All participants noted that being recognized for their academic achievements was part of being academically successful. Placement on the Dean's List or Honor Roll was an indication of high academic achievement. Derrick expressed personal satisfaction when he announced that he had made the Dean's List twice as did James who has made the President's List as well as the Dean's List. Other forms of academic recognition were also addressed like being accepted into an honors program. James stated, "to use African American Men and scholar combined…it's like a badge of honor."

Academic definitions of success include motivation, acclimation, overcoming

race related challenges and recognition. Other recurring themes that emerged in relation to academic success were the ability to overcome challenging academic assignments with the assistance of instructors or other learning resources such as tutors. Supportive and encouraging instructors also emerged as a theme in which participants characterized them as factors that aid in academic success.

Interview Question - Describe your definition of success in general.

Success in General

In order to gain a more thorough understanding of success from the perspective of African American males in community college, they were asked to provide their perception of success in general. Participants had a clear delineation between academic success and success in general. Although they were not asked to identify one concept as a priority, the concept of success in general takes precedence over their concept of academic success. The recurring themes for success in general were:

(1) *Strength.* Understood as persisting through and beyond mental and emotional challenges, not physical,

(2) *Being Better than White Men*. Understood as participants perceiving himself in comparison to the achievements of other men based on race,

(3) *Being a Man*. Understood as embodying the principles of masculinity from a heterosexual perspective.

Strength. Demonstrating the ability to persist through and beyond mental and emotional challenges was characteristic of being successful in general. Phrases such as, "try harder", "overcome weakness", and "embrace trials and errors" were used to describe success from a position of strength. Taylor stated:

> Seek to weed out your weaknesses and overcome those…the perception of inferiority I believe is one weakness. Another weakness may be the lack of development…success is always trying to better yourself.

Strength as a component of academic success is aligned with overcoming racial challenges or the challenge of adjusting to the academic environment. Preston recalled, "My mother used to always tell me that if it's easy, then it's not worth it."

Being Better than White Men. Participants feel that demonstrating and being recognized for achievements that rank higher than the achievements that White men are recognized for is a measure of success. Moreover, some participants acknowledged that White men define the measure of success and they need to perform beyond that definition. Taylor shared, "success means to go above and beyond what others are doing", when he addressed the behaviors of African American males in the face of White males on campus. Success in this regard is akin to a competition that is deeply rooted in historical relationships between men, and in this case between African American and White men in an academic environment. Kevin summarized, "I feel I have to perform better and I have to adapt more to society's roles as an African American man than White males have to."

Being a Man. Expressed masculinity is commensurate with being a leader (Harper 2004). Participants overwhelmingly identified success with being perceived as and demonstrating the qualities of "being a man". Success in this regard is indistinguishable from being a "good father", "being a good husband", "providing for your family", and "being responsible". Participants also reported, "setting an example" and "being a role model" for their children as characteristics of a success and man. In

addition to being a leader in their families, participants also reported the ability to lead and be of service to other African American males in the community and in the community college as a characteristic of success.

Interview Question – Has your definition of success changed over time? If so, describe how has it changed and why has it changed.

Reasons for Change in Definition. Almost every participant indicated with a definitive "Yes" his definition of success has changed over time. This change was represented in their general definition of success not in their academic definition of success. Money was the most noted change in their perception of success. Yet the reasons for change coincided with significant life changing events and racism.

Money. Economic gains and the ability to financially support a family were the predominant measureable indicators of success for the participants. Money was the prevailing theme of the changed definition of success. Shawn expressed, "Yes, it used to be monetary was a big part of what I thought success was." Preston confirmed, "Yeah, my definition has changed a little bit over time. I used to think I was successful because I made over $55,000 a year until it was taken away."

Life Events. Significant life changing events were reported as reasons for the changing their concept of success. Job loss and starting a family were the primary life changing events that precipitated change in the concept of success. Derrick explained that he had one of the top listed businesses in the region, "[I] basically started from scratch and built up to that list of the best businesses…then that failed and it was like 'Wow' I thought I was going to be moving up." Preston also mentioned job loss as the event that changed his definition of success. Family dynamics are also significant events for change.

Shawn claimed, "I think once you start having children, you start realizing that there's a lot of other things going on in this world."

Racism. A powerful reason for change was racism. Researchers have noted that non-cognitive factors are integral to the success of Black students in higher education. Tracey and Sedlacek (1985) identified eight fundamental non-cognitive factors and noted that the ability to contend with racism is the most critical. Participants expressed disappointment in the lack of change in racial affairs as the catalyst for their changed perspective of success. Shawn noted that he now realizes that he could be successful in many ways "besides climbing a [corporate] ladder that White institutions set for you." Kevin stated:

> Over time, because I'm an older male, I see things that I thought would be different at this point in my life, and they are exactly the same. When I talk about that, I mean racism…nothing's changed. The racism is still here and I thought it wouldn't be.

Race as an incentive for changes in the concept of success is compelling for African American males. Albeit, their reported change was not related to their concept of academic success, racism and the academic environment were implied in their responses.

Summary

The traditional definition of success as it relates to community college refers to persistence, academic achievement, and advancement. Defining success in these limited terms serves to support a limited student body. African American males in community college are presented as being unsuccessful by the nature of this limiting definition. Success for African American males in community college is separated into two

categories, academic and success in general. The concept of academic success varies from motivation to create and accomplish goals to overcoming academic as well as racial challenges in the classroom. Success in general is more meaningful to African American males in community college than academic success. Success in general is a personal concept that is constantly in flux. However, it is clear that fulfilling the characteristics of "being a man" such as being responsible and providing for your family are measures of success.

Money as a measure of success was the most identified component of change for the concept of success. Reasons participants offered for changing their concept of success include significant life changing events and racism. Other life changing events such as incarceration, military service, and traveling abroad were cited as reasons for changes in the concept of success. Success for African American males in community college is not a stable concept it is in flux as life changes and personal growth ensues.

Although some participants in this study acknowledged components of the traditional definition of success as part of their concept of success, their entire concept of success was far more complex. Study participant Shawn summarizes the complexity of the concept success:

> I would say if you're trying to be successful in academics you don't need a degree in order to be a successful in academics, you just need that thirst for knowledge and be able to apply that knowledge in your immediate environment, so whether you have a degree or not you can still be successful…If I can continue to be authentic to my truth in my interactions throughout my social dialect, my emotional, mental and physical, I think that can create a level of success that I can look back on and say, "I felt I'd been successful." I'm trying to bring a good sense

of balance to all those dimensions of health and wellness, emotional, mental, occupational, environmental and by working on that and knowing that that's constantly in flux, but being aware of it and constantly moving forward in that direction is considered successful to me.

Holistic development, which is difficult to measure, permeates the concept of success for these participants. Although they understood that academic achievement and advancement are measures of success, many of the participants prioritized personal development as success.

In alignment with other expressed sentiments of success, such as "being a man" and "providing for your family", money as an indicator of success and the primary perspective of change suggests that as men mature, their priorities change, as does their measure of success.

Each participant remarked that even though they held a concept of success that informed their performance in community college, they believed that very few people, if any, at the college were interested in their perspective. When asked if any of them had been asked about their concept of success or if they believed faculty, staff or administrators cared about their perspective the participants replied "No."

Institutional Factors that Contribute to the Concept of Success

The following Table 6 depicts Interview Protocol questions 4-7 that were asked to study participants as it relates to Research Question 2.

Table 6

Interview Question Outline for Research Question 2

Guiding Research Question	Interview Questions
R2: What institutional factors contribute to their concept?	4. Describe what life is like at this institution as an African American male. 5. What has been your most significant experience at this community college? 6. How important is campus involvement to your success? 7. What are you experiences with student success programs on this campus?

Interview Protocol Questions 4-7: Describe what life is like at this institution as an African American man.

Questions 4 and 5 in the Research Interview Protocol provided the researcher the opportunity to combine responses to gain an overall perspective of the experiences of the larger group of participants. The combined responses illuminated themes and categories that addressed campus climate and campus engagement. The emerging themes and categories were: (a) isolation as it relates to campus climate, (b) faculty interactions, (c) peer interactions and (d) the daily challenges of being an African American male in society.

Campus Climate .Experiences on campus while attending community college are significant measures of success. Most literature points to campus climate as an indicator of success for marginalized students, African American males in particular. For this study, participants were asked multiple questions regarding their experiences on their

college campus. The telling of their experiences shed light on the concept of success that they hold. Despite the benefits derived from being engaged on campus, Black men are generally disengaged on campus (Cuyjet, 2006; Strayhorn, 2011; Wood, 2011). Most of the participants identified as members of a campus success group for African American men at their community college yet none of them perceived this membership as being involved on campus. Statement such as, "I don't have time to get involved," and "I'm not interested in doing anything here," are indicative of this skewed reality.

When describing their experiences, many participants reported a sense of isolation, loneliness and not belonging as well as dealing with issues of racism and stereotypes. In addition to these responses, participants also commented on their interactions with faculty and staff, and peers on their campuses. All of these experiences are aligned with the literature on campus climate however these participants also attributed overcoming these negative experiences as part of their concept of success.

Isolation. Many researchers (Cuyjet, 2006; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Harper, 2011; Strayhorn, 2008) have noted that Black students attending predominantly white institutions (PWIs) experience an unwelcoming campus climate. Fries-Britt & Turner (2001) report that Black men in particular perceive PWIs as hostile and experience alienation. Although the literature is focused on the setting of four-year institutions, the participants in this study echoed similar experiences in the community college setting. When asked to describe what life was like as an African American man at the community college they were attending, almost all participants used the terms "isolated" or "alienated". Shawn explained his experience this way,

As you get into a certain level of class, like [the] second level class…you look

around and realize you're the only person of color…In the actual classroom setting it's very much you're own your own with your own sense of strengths and abilities and you have to learn to use those in order to network and communicate with your instructors or classmates, and things like that, so it's different, it's isolated.

Kevin provided a more ominous response:

I would describe it as being sort of an animal in a zoo. Everybody is looking at you. You'd think in the 21st century that it wouldn't be like that, but even the younger generations [of white students] are still looking at African American as different from everyone else…for me as an African American man I have to realize that I'm being looked at and judged.

The feeling of isolation is also expressed via the lack of exposure to African American faculty. Anthony noted, "…as a black man…it has to be hard when you're at an institution where ... I have never had a black teacher." Kevin remarked, "You feel alienated as an African American man in college. You don't have any role models whatsoever to go to or see. Especially males." He also expressed that African American male students deal with alienation by acting White as way to belong. He explained:

There's no connection with African American students…there's no connection with the instructor. Those you kids are alienated you can see that. I think coming [to this community college] is not good for them, to fit in they just act like the White students.

James also reported on how he copes with the isolation and unwelcoming environment. He revealed that he repeats the mantra, "Act like I belong here, act like I belong here, which I truly do. I truly do belong here," to get through the emotionally tough times. James continued explaining his coping strategy for feeling isolated with this commentary:

Education's not dangerous. Education is not harmful… It can be harmful to people

that would look at an educated Black man and get intimidated by you and they don't know how to really come to you. But, that's their issue, not the person that's educated. That's their issue they've got to work on.

As a remedy to feeling isolated and being invisible, James suggested that African American males, "Be seen. Don't get lost. Don't get stuck in the crowd. Don't get stuck in the back."

The participants in this study echoed many of James' responses to feeling unwelcomed and isolated. More importantly, they all noted that they were individually responsible for changing the way that they were feeling. In other words, these African American men have internalized responsibility for feeling unwelcomed and isolated in an academic setting. Anthony summarized this sentiment with the following:

You don't have to like it, but you just have to accept it and get through it, because it's not going to be something that's going to be with you permanently. It's a temporary step, stepping stone to the next phase.

When addressing what life is like on campus for African American males and the feelings of isolation and being unwelcomed, these participants internalized the responsibility of those feelings. Additionally, they engage in self-talk and behaviors to align with the White student population as coping strategies to maneuver through their academic careers when faced with a climate that is isolating.

Other themes resurfaced as tactics for addressing isolation and alienation. As noted earlier, "being better than White males" was part of the concept of success held by many participants. This thought process moves to demonstration when participants employ this tactic as a way of navigating a campus climate that is unwelcoming. Participants noted that because they are faced with an expectation of not performing as

well academically as white students, they must work harder than white students to gain similar recognition.

*Faculty Interaction***.** Many studies have identified faculty interaction as a significant influence to the success of Black community college students (Bush & Bush, 2010; Cuyjet, 2006; Howard, 2014; Wood 2012).   White students report having the greatest satisfaction with faculty relationships while the opposite is true for Black students (Davis, 1994; Fleming, 1984; Guiffrida, 2005). Although the literature indicates that Black students have less satisfying relationships with faculty, the participants in this study had varying responses to this issue. While it would seem that race would be the defining factor for satisfactory interactions with faculty and other college staff members, the participants in this study did not necessarily find that to be an issue.

Four factors crucial for positive faculty-student interaction with African American male students in community have been identified (e.g. friendly, displayed concern for performance, listening to students' concerns, and encouragement to maximize potential), research has found that these male students perceive faculty and other staff as unsupportive and not invested in their success (Bush& Bush, 2010; Wood, 2012; Wood & Turner, 2011).   Although findings of pervious research is not categorically true for all the participants in this study, the notion of not being cared about was acknowledged. James suggested, "I think for African Americans, if they knew that someone cared, they'd try a little harder. But guess what, if I'm sitting in a classroom, and the teacher don't care, what does that tells me?"

Black men perceive faculty in community colleges to be unsupportive and apathetic toward their success (Bush & Bush, 2010; Wood, 2012).   When asked if they

thought that the faculty at the college they were attending recognized, supported or

celebrated them when they were trying their best, most participants responded "No."

Anthony elaborated:

> Some teachers do, and some don't. I mean ... because, see something else I've
> learned. I can't fault the institution, you know, because of a few bad
> apples…because if I did, then I wouldn't be succeeding.

Similarly when asked if they thought that the faculty and staff supported their academic

growth and moving forward in their academic careers, most participants responded,

"No". Shawn explained, "No. I just don't, unless a particular instructor takes a particular

interest. That goes outside the norm." He continued:

> I think that having more transparency with their students, with the directions their
> goals are going needs to happen more. I'm constantly hearing from other students
> [that], advisors, they're not sitting down with you and saying, "What is your
> vision? What is your mission and what [are] your goals and your tactics to get
> there? I'm here to guide you to help you complete that goal"

From their perspective, African American men don't expect or find it normal to have a

faculty or staff member care about them or their success while in community college.

James suggested that African American men needed to make their presence

known if they wanted to have better relationships on campus. He stated, "I think the more

you make your presence known, then everything starts to change." As noted earlier,

African American males have learned to internalize and accept not being supported in an

academic environment. However learning to accept an unsupportive environment has

also positioned them to take responsibility for changing the unwelcoming, unsupportive

and uncaring climate they find on community college campuses.

Despite the fact that previous studies have found that Black men perceive faculty as unsupportive, some participants in this study openly credit community college faculty and staff that demonstrated personal care as significant individuals contributing to their success while in college. Anthony expressed, "Don't get me wrong, some of the teachers ... most of them ... no, I'll say the majority of my teachers have been very instrumental in trying to get me to succeed." Anthony specifically noted that his writing instructor saw his potential and encouraged him to do his best and not give up:

> I realized that she was a teacher that believed in academic success, we'd say, and she prided herself on it. But at the same time, she knew that you [couldn't] do it ... She'd say, "I can't ask you to do something if I'm not going to be there to help you." That's what she did. She kept encouraging me, always, "Do you, don't worry about it, you do it, you do it." She's my friend now.

Another participant, James, recounts his interaction with the first person he met at the college he attends:

> She's been here for, like, over twenty years. When I talked to her, she noticed my condition right off the bat. She noticed that I was a ... what do they call me? An introvert, where you don't go out much? I don't say much. She noticed that right off the bat and she said, "Well, whenever you're ready to talk," she gave me her card. "Feel free to give me a call," and left me alone. I was like, "Wow." Just that. I broke down one day and I called her, you know? She said, "I knew you would." We struck up a friendship and I solely base everything off me staying in school to her because she asked me some things that I wanted to do, and asked some things that I'm good at. I see a lot of instructors, advisors, or just any staff, period, including public safety ... they're here to help, not to hinder.

The account that James shared embodies all four of the factors that are crucial for faculty-student interactions yet his interaction was with a staff member. Therefore, it is safe to

posit that being friendly, demonstrating concern, listening and providing encouragement transcend faculty-student relationships and are beneficial for all relationships with African American males in community college. These factors are notably important for college staff that has first contact with students.

   Peer Interaction. Poole (2006) noted that peer support is vital to the success Black men in community colleges. Peer interaction has an important role in determining GPA, transfer and degree and/or certificate attainment for Black males in college (Bush & Bush, 2010). Peer groups are the single most powerful influence on student's academic and personal development (Astin, 1993, p.8). For Black students in higher education, peer groups help facilitate a sense of belonging (Bonner & Bailey, 2006). The participants in this study expressed a desire to connect and interact with other African American male peers, yet found that prospect daunting at best. Shawn remarked, "If I'm walking on campus I don't feel that presence. A lot of times African-American students that are on campus, aren't even make eye contact with each other."

   Gardenhire-Crooks, et al. (2010) found that many Black males felt that being engaged with peers would hinder their success. Taylor supported this finding by stating:

   I interact with instructors but I'm sort of a loner in the classroom. I work best by
   myself because I get distracted by other students. Campus involvement is
   important when it comes to talking to my instructors and networking with them,
   but not so much when it comes to my peers.

Despite the findings from other studies regarding the benefit of peer groups for African American males in higher education, the participants in this study aligned campus involvement with peer interaction and were not interested in getting involved. Yet, they were interested in simple forms of recognition like making eye contact or saying hello.

Race was addressed in regards to peer interaction. Shawn stated, "I was always talking to people about why white people can be more successful in the academic community [it's] because a white will talk to other white people." Continuing with the topic of race as it relates to peer interaction it became clear that racism and stereotypes created a barrier to peer interaction across racial lines. James, a longtime resident of the community where his college is located, has experienced the decline and gentrification of the neighborhood. He explained:

> I know [that] some other students may have problems with African Americans being on this campus, but I figure that's just a part of life. When they see African American men on campus, they tend to associate [them] with certain things [like] the neighborhood, because the neighborhood used to be a certain way. Usually, when an African American man is on campus, they don't know if he is going to school here or if he was part of the neighborhood.

Once again, African American males have learned to accept discriminating behaviors in the academic arena as the norm. They consistently supply the narrative to support the norm of racism that they experience. As this practice relates to peer interactions and interactions on campus in general, racism and stereotypes may account for the feeling of alienation expressed by the participants in this study.

Daily Challenges. The men in this study understand the value of having faculty and staff demonstrate care for their wellbeing while attending community college. However, their greatest concern was that they did not believe that community college staff, faculty and administrators understand the daily challenges African American males encounter, which generate obstacles and restrictions in their academic journey. A particular occurrence that emerged was night activity and the police. These men alter

their behavior to avoid an interaction with the police that could bring harm and prevent them from completing their education. Shawn noted, " I take my hat off when I'm in the car at night. If I'm driving home on a Friday or Saturday night I take my hat off just because I know I'll be racially harmed." Kevin reported that he didn't drive at night for fear of engaging with the police. He also didn't take night classes as some other participants reported because they couldn't risk walking in the parking lot at night and being perceived as a criminal. Taylor recalled:

> It was finals week and I had stay late at the library. My mother was worried about me getting pulled over on the way home. I was worried too. Being afraid of Black men, thinking they might have a gun or something. You make the wrong move and something bad can happen. I don't think [anyone at this college] understands. There's a certain fear, it's late and you're walking home and you see a cop circle around the block a couple times and you get nervous. You don't know what might happen. There's a fear and I think it's hard for certain people to understand that.

Taylor continued by noting that white men on campus don't have to worry about the police so much. He stated, "I don't think that's a fear for them." Most of the participants acknowledged that white males and African American women don't have the similar experiences and fears when it comes to fearing the police and the challenges this poses to being successful in community college. None of these men believed that any faculty, staff or administration member understood or cared about the challenges they face every day to simply continue their education. Shawn acknowledged:

> There's good people that are trying to bring awareness, I do recognize that at this institution between the multi-cultural center there's always a good handful of people that are trying raise awareness…you have to ask yourself the question, 'Is it the institutions job to set up this whole thing that's going to help African-

American men, is that their job?' I don't know. I think to have the tools and resource because you are in an environment where you had African-American men and you want to see this group rise up I think yes because we're trying to raise [our level of] education…I think that do they have the responsibility.

A lack of understanding the daily challenges African American males face that impact the pursuit of their academic careers is the most notable issue addressed by the participants in this study. Making it to school without being stopped by the police is perceived as success while attending community college. Some of the participants acknowledged that while they don't drive at night, they also don't take night classes for fear of being accused as a thief when walking through the campus parking lot to get to their car. African American male students tailor their behavior on and off campus in evening hours to prevent interactions with law enforcement. It is daily challenges such as this that go unrecognized by faculty, staff, and administrators.

Non-Institutional Factors that Contribute to the Concept of Success

The following Table 7 details Interview Protocol questions 8-15 that were asked to study participants in relation to Research Question 3, specifically identifying non-institutional factors that help achieve and create barriers to academic success for African American males in community college.

Table 7

Interview Question Outline for Research Question 3

Guiding Research Question	Interview Questions

R3: What non-institutional factors contribute to their concept?	**8**. When African American men do not achieve success in college, what are the primary factors you think make it difficult to achieve success? **9**. When African American men achieve success academic success in college, what are the primary factors you think help them achieve success? **10.**Who has played a significant role in your ability to see yourself as academically successful? **11.**What role or impact did your family have on your ability to see yourself as academically successful? **12.**What role has mentoring played in your life to see yourself as academically successful? **13.**What motivates you to do your best? **14.**What influences promoting African American achievement are you familiar with in community colleges? **15.**What information or insights would you share with other African American males in community college to help them overcome barriers and succeed academically?

Questions 8-15 in the Research Interview Protocol allowed the researcher to relate individual responses to the overall perspective of the larger group of African American males' perceptions of factors that contribute to their concept of success while attending community college. Interview responses were combined and continuous themes emerged describing aspects that influence concepts of success held by African American males: (a) challenging images and stereotypes, (b) financial status as it supports and challenges success, (c) family support as it hinders and aids success and (d) personal growth associated with challenges in relation to perceived personal success.

Images and Stereotypes. Many of the contemporary portrayals of Black males depict them as subhuman, criminals, absent-minded, and buffoons (Polite & Davis, 1999). Howard (2014) presents 5 (five) depictions of the Black male image that has shaped public perception for over the past 400 years. Black males have been depicted as:

(1) an uneducated physical brute, (2) lazy, (3) hypersexual, (4) criminals, and (5) gangsters (Howard, 2014). These images support historical and current stereotypes that are used to judge African American males in academic settings. Participants in this study report being perceived and judged through the lens of these stereotypes by faculty and staff and they expresses how being judged affects their academic performance. Taylor shared that his instructors have low expectations of him because he is African American. He revealed,

> For instance, [I get] surprise from instructors by the level of my work. [They're] somewhat expecting it to have been stolen or copied and not believing that it's actually my work…There are instances where regardless how hard you work, some people are so trapped in their perceptions that they can't acknowledge

Kevin echoed the same perception when he stated, "Every African American [at this college] is at a disadvantage. They have to constantly put up with stereotypes within classes, from instructors that should know better." The images and stereotypes that are attributed to African American males affect their concept of success and their performance in community college.

Stereotypes and images create an immeasurable depth of destruction within the psyche of African American males. They have learned to accept and internalize the negative imagery and messages associated with them so much that it has detrimental effect on their concept of success. When asked what primary factors make it difficult for African American males to succeed in community college, Taylor replied:

> The perception that they are inferior, the perception that they don't have what it takes to be as good as in the classroom as white students. They've been told [this] their whole life not just verbally, but through the media, and through the attitudes of [college] instructors. They feel that they're not as good [as white students]; that

they can't possibly be the one to achieve greatness and they goals the set [for themselves].

Shawn continued this idea by sharing,

I think a lot of African American young men are stuck and …their influences is not only their immediate environment but multimedia. What are we seeing? …every time you turn on the news it's all about Black men getting arrested.

Wood and Palmer (2015) conclude that the constant negative media portrayal of African American males contributes to the challenges and problems they experience in education. The participants in this study confirm the effect of negative images and stereotypes perpetuated through media on their concept of success.

Perceptions of African American males create disconnecting relationships with society. A love-hate affair with Black males has developed and become a concern. Howard (2014) reported, "They are loved when they are perceived as nonthreatening, profitable, and entertaining, yet they are reviled if they are viewed as hostile, intelligent, nonconforming, independent, or strong-willed," (p. 31). The irrational love-hate affair represents the way the participants in this study perceive their relationship with faculty, staff and administrators in community college. Explaining his perception of White community college leaders, James asserted, "They always say they want us to be educated, but they don't [really] want us to [be educated]."

Anthony, also expressed his perspective of the relationship:

I think one reason why they keep saying we're not successful is another way to deter our dreams, to just tear us down. They keep saying we're stupid and things…we weren't stupid, we just didn't know. Once we were able to do it, we overcame it. We taught ourselves. We are the only race that [they] fear. Why do they feel the need to suppress everything we do? And then what we do, we do it

so well [they] begin to imitate us, which takes everything we did away from us. The love-hate relationship victimizes African American males. They are forced to be successful and survive in an environment that is sustained on loving and hating them with the same amount of passion.

Resilience. Prove-Them -Wrong Syndrome provides insight into why Black men are able to persist in an environment rife with perceptions of Black inferiority. Openly challenging the negative imagery and stereotypes of African American males shared in community colleges is a manifestation of the syndrome. Prove-Them-Wrong Syndrome coupled with a sense of pride is a tactic used by African American males in community college to secure their concept of success. The goal for those with the syndrome is to prove naysayers wrong, especially those who doubt and belonging in college (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Participants in this study described experiences were they engaged this tactic to successfully navigate community college.

Messages examined through the lens of the syndrome are shared as motivation and advice for African American males to obtain and sustain success in community college. Taylor advised, "Students need to be able to persevere, need to have strength to overcome whatever's thrown their way." James suggested that African American males in community college need to have "confidence in themselves and not be afraid to try…and not give up". Prove-Them-Wrong Syndrome is a mechanism for constructing counter narratives of success. When asked what motivates him, Kevin explained "Just being Black… I'm proud to be an African American, and I'm going to break every single stereotype that was put out there against me. That motivates me." These concepts of success are undeniably a strong representation of voice and counter narrative to the

traditional perspective of success. Additionally, the Prove-Them-Wrong Syndrome is clearly evident in these sentiments.

Finance and Employment. Finances and employment are integral component to the concept of success for African American males. The ability to pay for college influences the success of Black men in college (Palmer, Wood, Dancy & Strayhorn 2014). Participants categorized finances and employment as factors that help achieve and create a barrier to success. They expressed a need for access to financial aid and scholarships as a means to support themselves and their families while attending community college. None of these participants relied on their families for financial support.

The participants who were employed factored their employment into their concept of success. Often this perception included the struggle to balance work and school. It also served to differentiate how success is achieved for those who are employed versus those who are not. Derrick made such a comparison and stated:

> They might not have a whole lot of things that they have to do when they leave school, like go to work. Like yesterday, it's a long day for me. After I got out class, I have to go to work ... oh, it's a cleaning service that I used to run, so I do it by myself, so I go there now and do it by myself. Don't get home until about ten, I still got papers I got to type up and then I'm like, "Okay, I'll do it first thing in the morning," ... anyway, I just think that they don't have a lot of things going on in their life, so they're able to focus.

The type of employment the participants were engaged in and the time of day they had to go to work, created a different perspective of the role employment plays their perception of success.

"There is evidence that employment influences success for college students, but that impact depends of the location and nature of work" (Palmer et al., 2014, pg. 77).

Family Support. Many scholars have identified factors that are positively related to the success of African American males in community college. Family support is critical to the success of African Americans in higher education (Mosby, 2009; Strayhorn, 2011; Wood 2012). Almost every participant, regardless of the current relationship, identified their mother as having a significant role in their ability to see themselves as successful. Taylor remarked about his mother is this way:

> Of course, my mother was the main one challenging me growing up. She would always encourage me. At the same time, she would challenge me because she knew that I could be better. She took the time to study with me. She took the time to give me a love for reading and for knowledge.

Palmer et al. (2011) indicated that family members provided inspirational and encouraging messages that impacted the success of Black male students even when those family members lacked formal education. Anthony affirms this notion when he stated, "My mother … she doesn't have her bachelor's … helped me academically by being supportive and loving." Daughters, aunts, grandmothers and wives were also identified as having a significant impact in perceiving these men as successful. Fundamentally, the concept of success for African American males is deeply tied to relationships with women.

Although all of the participants identified a significant female family member as being an instrumental element in the way they perceive success, Guiffrida (2004) found that family circumstances and strain had a negative impact of the academic performance of Black students. When asked about factors that prevented African American males

from succeeding in community college, some participants stated "family issues" and many of these issues refer to women. Shawn explicitly stated that being raised by a single mother with multiple responsibilities is a factor in African American males not succeeding:

> You have a lot of single parents, especially single black women that are raising young men and woman by themselves, usually working 1 to 2 jobs so there's an aunt, a grandmother that's participating in the raising in that child.

Wood (2011) found that family responsibilities were a hindrance to the success of Black men recently enrolled community college. Anthony supported this claim when he announced that "marital issues" and "custody issues" prevent African American males from succeeding in community college. Participants noted other significant family issues that hinder African American males in succeeding while in community college. Two of the most prominent issues were parents with mental illness and being a foster child or ward of the state.

The role of family is complicated and at times contradictory when addressing success for African American males in community college. Single mothers and absent fathers create a unique and challenging environment when it comes to success for African American males. From one perspective single mothers are lauded for loving and supporting their sons while absent fathers are credited with contributing to factors that prevent their sons from succeeding. Yet, being raised by a single mother and all of the challenges associated with that are also noted for being a factor that creates a barrier to success for these men. Fundamentally, the role of a strong supportive woman in the life of an African American male contributes to way he perceives and pursues success in academia.

Participants confirm that family support is instrumental to their success while in community college. Moreover, they point to significant women in their lives e.g., wives, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and daughters as being primary motivators for them to succeed. These women are also responsible for sending messages encouragement that resonate with these men as they pursue their academic careers and beyond. Although many of the women did not acquire the same level of education as these men, their influence and support helps them maneuver through difficult academic challenges. These men report a component of their concept of success as "not letting [these women] down under any circumstances" and as one participant expressed, "I'm doing this for her," in reference to his daughter.

Personal Growth

Identity and Masculinity. The psychological development of African American males in college is important when examining their concept of success. Defining the characteristics of being a man, as noted earlier, is related to how African American males perceive and express masculinity. Being accountable, displaying character, pursuing academic excellence, becoming a leader and serving their community are reported demonstrations of masculinity by high achieving African American males in college (Harper, 2004; Martin & Harris, 2006). While African American males that are characterized as "low performers" perceived masculinity as accumulating and displaying material wealth, being competitive, and developing sexual relationships with women. The men in this study also expressed that becoming a leader and serving their community are demonstrations of their masculinity. Identity and demonstrations of masculinity

contribute to the concept of success held by African American males in community college.

The participants in this study attributed many of the characteristics of masculinity defined by low performing African American males to explain why young African American males in community college are not successful. The attribute that was described the most was, "only concerned with financial aid" aligns with concern for accumulation of material wealth. Participants noted that low performing African American males in community college "only come for the financial aid" or "are here to get the money only." Economic security is perceived as a component of success for both high achieving and low performing African American males in community college. However, the means of attaining this type of security marks a difference in perception of masculinity.

Participants also defined other attributes of masculinity by comparing and contrasting locus of control. As noted above, high achieving African American male college students perceive being accountable as a demonstration of masculinity. In this study, Anthony noted that African American males in community college that don't achieve success "lack responsibility and accountability." Contrasting his behavior he explained:

> It's like, if I fail, I fail because I didn't try. I think that's a lot of it. We allow other obstacle out there to derail us from our primary goal, whether that is teachers, racism, our peers, or family. Because in order to achieve that success, it has to begin within me, and I can't let them derail me from that.

The participants in this study identified responsibility and accountability specifically for academic outcomes as characteristics of masculinity for high performing African

American males in community college. Identifying goals is also linked to achievement and masculinity.

The most notable finding regarding identity and masculinity from participants in this study was the inability to share personal dreams and seeking support. Scholars have reported that developing meaningful interpersonal relationships and seeking support when needed are vital for the development of men in college. Harris and Harper (2008) claimed that African American males are less likely to engage in these behaviors "because they are traditionally defined as feminine and conflict with lessons about masculinity prior to college," (p.29). Shawn expressed that verbally sharing dreams and asking for help are signs of "weakness". He shared:

> I think [sharing your dreams] is perceived as weakness…it's cultural and not thug enough to share your dreams, it's not thug enough and hard enough to want something more…Some people don't even know where to go to get help. I feel less of a man because I have to ask someone for help. [It's] ego and pride, this is all a big part of our community.

The participants in this study confirm the perceptions of masculinity as noted in existing literature. Characteristics attributed to high achieving African American males in college were acknowledged as factors that supported their concept of success. Masculine characteristics of low performing African Americans were also attributed to factors that prevent these men from succeeding in community college. Study participants understood that low achieving African American males perceived behaviors, which contributed to success as weak and unmasculine. Identity and masculinity are strong contributors to the concept of success held by African American males in community college.

Mentors. Participants identified important people that played significant roles in how they perceive themselves as successful. Mentors were mentioned in addition to family members. Mentors are salient to the success of Black students (Cuyjet, 2006; Scott, 2012, Wood & Palmer, 2012). Most participants reported having a relationship with a campus mentor. Scott (2012) noted that mentors are leaders and help to create a welcoming climate on campus. Leadership was noted as a skill possessed yet also as an element missing from the African American male community on their campuses.

The participants that identified a campus leader or mentor viewed this person as a significant component of their success while in community college. Derrick spoke about a faculty member as his mentor. He noted that having a mentor, someone he could talk to and seek guidance from, has been inspirational in his academic career and life. Derrick expressed:

> I wish I had known him years ago. He's [an] inspiration in my life. He talks in the now, it's never, "Do you think you can?" It's always, "You will." He gives me the understanding that I [shouldn't] talk in the person that [I am], talk in the person that [I am] becoming. I'm always evolving. I'm like, "Yeah, I love this!'

Mentors are not only faculty members or program directors, Anthony acknowledged his friend as his mentor. He defined a mentor as "someone that's in your life that's a positive role model." His friend, Jerome attended the same community college that Anthony is currently attending. Jerome continued with his academic career and earned his master's degree. Jerome encouraged Anthony to enroll in community college and Anthony has plans to follow his lead and earn his master's degree as well.

All of the participants, regardless if they had a mentoring experience on campus, indicated a desire to mentor other African American students. Students who become

mentors helped to create a welcoming and affirming climate by sharing insights and important information about resources and other opportunities for engagement (Harper, 2012). After learning that there were no African American male science teachers in his immediate area Shawn remarked:

> …imagine not seeing someone that looks like you taking a special interest in [you]. I think as a man in college you have a responsibility…isn't it my responsibility to use [the] tools and skill set that I have to help bring other African American men up in any way I can…If you get the already existing African-American men and woman that are in school involved or being a leader in that way, that can be a dominant influence in promoting African-American success in academics.

The participants agreed that the community college should take more interest in training and hiring faculty who view their role as mentors and leaders. They see this as a step in connecting with students, particularly African American students, and helping them express and realize their vision of success.

Spirituality. Participants in this study included their spirituality as they explored their concept of success. McIntosh (2015) defined spirituality in three ways: as reliance on a higher power beyond oneself, as a foundation for one's approach to life, and as a source of strength during difficult times. Herndon (2003) found that spirituality was critical to the success of Black male students and was credited for upholding their resiliency to overcome challenges and providing a sense of purpose. Weddle-West, Hagan, & Norwood (2013) concluded that spirituality might be a coping mechanism for Black students at institutions where they are consistently challenged with racism and stereotypes. Many of the participants in this study addressed their spirituality as a source

of motivation to success. Taylor stated, "What motivates me to do my best? My beliefs, my religious beliefs that I am called to be my best."

Other participants reflected on lessons learned in a spiritual context to explain how they overcome challenges and perceive success. Derrick, self-identified as Muslim, used his spirituality as a lens for examining inequities in the classroom and with other college staff. His religious beliefs provided an understanding for what he was experiencing as well as a framework to move beyond the challenges. Preston, self-identified as a Jehovah's Witness, aligned his spirituality with being mentored and being a mentor. Preston explained, "Mentoring has always been a big factor in my life because all of my life I was mentored…Jehovah's Witnesses, that's what they do. [They] try to teach and want better for others." For Preston, he credits his spirituality as the foundation for his concept of success. His religion has impressed upon him that "honesty and helping others" is the pathway to success.

Spirituality is a component of how African American males in community college perceive success. Most participants relied on their spirituality as a motivator to succeed when challenged. The challenges could stem from personal growth and seeking an identity to inequities in the academic environment. Spirituality is tool to gain clarity and move to a space of productivity. Based on the role that spirituality plays in African American communities, it is no surprise that these participants sought comfort and guidance from their belief systems as they progress while attending community college.

Summary

Many themes emerged from the research questions. Although the reasons for attending community college were not part of the research protocol, the responses and themes that materialized are critical to understanding how African American males conceptualize success. Social mobility, individual growth and changing the perception of African American males in college were the main the themes for why the participants choose to attend community college. The participants all expressed a desire to increase the economic worth and perceived college attendance as the fastest way to accomplish that goal. Since most participants were over the age of 30, their concerns with attending college also addressed learning more about themselves and creating a positive image of higher education for their children.

Participants were asked about their definition of success. They were asked to address success in two categories, academic success and success in general. Academic success was perceived as overcoming challenges that were not related to academics. The themes that emerged from this concept of success were motivation, acclimation, racism and recognition. All of the participants indicated that grade point averages, graduating, and transferring to a university is not necessary to be deemed successful in an academic setting.

Success in general was the participants overall view of success as it applied to their lives while in community college. General success was characterized as demonstrating strength, being better than White men and being a man. Being perceived as a whole African American man is intrinsic to the participants' concept of success. The elements of academic and general success will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

The factors that contributed to the concept of success were also explored and separated into two categories, institutional and non- institutional. The institutional factors that contributed to the participants' concept of success were campus climate with an emphasis on isolation, positive and negative faculty and peer interactions and the daily challenges of being an African American male. Non-institutional factors included images and stereotypes of African Americans, financial status and issues, family support and personal growth and challenges. These issues will be discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine how African American males in community college perceive success while pursuing their academic goals through the theoretical framework of CRT. Critical Race Theory (CRT) challenges the notion of meritocracy of the United States (U.S.) using race and racism as a lens in critiquing issues (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Taylor (1998) asserts that CRT is a type of ''scholarship of the people'' that put the experiences of "nonwhites" as a central component to education research and theory. The data were collected through qualitative interviews with 7 self-identified African American male students attending community college in the Pacific Northwest region of the country. The data from these interviews generated perspectives about success, racism, support and personal growth as discussed in Chapter 4. This chapter will discuss the implications of those findings as they relate to the research questions, and to the review of the literature. In addition, this chapter will discuss implications of the study for community college professionals and suggestions for further research.

Relation of Findings to Research Question 1

The first research question asks, what is the concept of success held by African American males while pursuing their academic goals in community college? The data collected for this study provide answers to that question in several ways.

In order to obtain data with regard to the concept of success, participants were asked to describe their definition of success. To gain a better understanding of the participants' concept of success and to establish a distinction between academic success

and success in general, participants were asked to provide their definitions of both. In order to extract data with regard to the significance of their current definitions of success, participants were also asked if their definitions had changed over time. Included in that query were questions of how their definitions changed and why they changed (see Appendix D).

The primary issue of concern in this research was the definition of success. More importantly, this research sought to examine and add the voice of African American males pursing higher education to the definition of success. The findings indicate that the participants did not outright reject the traditional definition of success that permeates higher education. The participants acknowledged the narrow and racial boundaries of the traditional definition. All participants reported that success was more than the quantifiable terms of the definition embraced by higher education. Success is a complex journey of challenging social forces and historical structures while embracing and pursuing personal dreams and goals.

Definition of Success. Participants were asked to define success from an academic perspective as well as a general perspective. Academic success was described in terms that did not relate to academic performance. The most compelling component for defining success in an academic environment was overcoming challenges. A significant challenge reported by all of the participants was the ability to remain in a hostile academic environment in the face of racism and seek recognition for overcoming academic challenges. The ability to engage in an environment that was not designed for their success promotes the counter-narrative and definition of success that these African American males hold. Based on their experiences, the definition of academic success for

these African American males in community college could be summarized as the willingness to accomplish goals in an environment that requires acclimation and overcoming racism while seeking recognition.

Defining success from a general perspective also allows for African American males to contribute their voice to the narrative of success. All of the participants noted that their general definition of success was more valuable and important than their academic definition of success. Strength was one of the predominant themes that emerged from their concept of success. As noted with their concept of academic success, strength refers to persisting through and beyond emotional and mental challenges. Having the strength to overcome a challenge is reported as a component of success for African American males in community college.

Being better than White men. Participants also aligned the challenge of being better than White men with their concept of general success. African American men have been exposed to the hegemonic narrative that White men are better than Black men since birth. The narrative has been repeated in every interaction that has occurred in his academic careers. Du Bois (1903) explained this challenge as double consciousness. Double consciousness is the social and psychological tensions that African Americans experience as a result of negotiating their racial identity in the context of white dominant values and cultural practices. Delpit (1988) explained that those in power define "normalcy" and success in institutions. Consequently, the narrative loops the idea that to be successful in school or the workplace African American males should behave in a manner defined and demonstrated by White males. Race continues to be a significant factor for determining inequity in the U.S. (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The African American males in this study indicated that being recognized, as being better than White men is important to their concept of success. Again, success was not related to academic performance. In order to be better than Whites and define the culture of power, African American males would need to create a narrative that includes the definition of being a man and eliminating the need for him to compensate for institutional barriers to success or the effort-outcome gap. Green, Marti & McClenney (2008) described the practice of putting forth more effort "to compensate for a pervasive combination of academic and institutional barriers to educational success," (p. 529) as the effort-outcome gap. The pathway to being better than a White man could be obtained by eliminating the need to compensate for barriers to success. A general concept of success for African American males pursuing academic goals in community college could be stated as possessing and demonstrating the strength to overcome the emotional and mental challenges of not having the cultural power to define him as normal. Implied in this action is the practice of internalizing messages and taking responsibility for oppression.

Change in Definition of Success

Money. The accumulation of wealth or money was the most identified component of success that changed for the participants in this study. Merriam – Webster's entry for a definition of success is "getting or achieving wealth" and "the attainment of popularity or profit." Significant life changing events such as starting a family and losing a job were often cited as reasons for the change to their definition of success. Other life changing events such as incarceration, military service, and traveling abroad were mentioned as reasons for changes in the concept of success. Experiencing

racism at work, at school or in any institutional structure was the reason that all participants had in common for changing the focus of their concept of success from money to personal growth.

Summary

The traditional definition of success as it relates to community college refers to persistence, academic achievement, and advancement. Defining success in these limited terms serves to support a limited student body. African American males in community college are presented as being unsuccessful by the nature of this limiting definition. Success for African American males in community college is separated into two categories, academic and success in general. The components of academic success include motivation, getting acclimated to the community college environment, overcoming racism, and gaining recognition for overcoming institutional and academic challenges. While the components for the concept of success in general include strength to persist beyond emotional and mental challenges, being better than white men and eliminating the effort-outcome gap, and being perceived as a man. For the participants in this study success in general is more meaningful to the pursuit of their academic goals than academic success.

Distinct narratives of success are clear when the concept of success held by African American males in community college is examined. The institution or community college covets the traditional narrative of success that is linked to a culture of power. African American male participants in this study have created their own narrative of success that is not acknowledged or supported by the community college. The men in this study believe that the institution as a whole does not care and is not interested in their

narrative or concept success yet, their given reasons for attending community college is aligned with their concept of success. The disconnect between the college's concept of success and the concept held by African American males could provide an explanation for why institutions perceive African American males as unsuccessful while pursuing academic goals in community college. Success for African American males in community college is not a stable concept, it is in flux as life changes and personal growth ensues. Harper (2014) noted that early efforts to examine the plight of African American males in higher education positioned him as the problem that needed to be fixed and ignored institutional and structural forces that undermined his academic achievement, sense of belonging, and psychosocial development. Instead of asking African American males in community college, " What is your GPA?" when seeking to aid them in their academic endeavors it may be more beneficial to ask, "What form or type of racial discrimination did you have to overcome today?" thus allowing their voice and experiences start the conversation of change.

Relation of Findings to Secondary Research Questions 2 & 3

The secondary research questions ask what factors institutional and non-institutional, contribute to the participants' concept of success while pursing academic goals at a community college. Many factors were identified however three main factors emerged as institutional factors: isolation, faculty interaction and peer interaction, and four main factors emerged as non-institutional factors: images and stereotypes, financial status, family support and personal growth due to challenges. One factor, the daily challenges of an African American male, was also identified and crosses the boundary between both factors.

Institutional Factors

The participants in this study reported feeling isolated and unwelcomed at the community college they attended. One participant described his experience as feeling like he was "in a zoo." Participants related experiencing racism to their feeling of "not belonging" at the community college. Negative interactions with faculty and peers also contributed to their experiences at the community college. These factors create an environment of challenges that the participants have to overcome in order to persist.

Most participants reported that faculty had low expectations of their academic performance. They also believed that some faculty viewed them through the stereotypical lens of a "trouble maker" and "a failure." Bonner and Bailey (2006) suggested that some faculty members perceive Black men as having low expectations of their academic success. Based on interactions such as these with faculty members, African American males often develop a "prove them wrong mentality" (Palmer et al., 2014). Wood and Palmer (2015) examine Prove -Them-Wrong-Syndrome that was introduced by Moore et al. in 2003. According to Wood and Palmer (2015) there are four components to the theory: structural conditions, affective disposition, intended outcome and affective response. The participants in this study meet the components of the theory. Although the original study was situated at a PWI and the subjects were STEM majors, the outcome was the same for the participants in this study. Proving their White instructors and peers wrong about the stereotypes they hold regarding their academic performance is a substantial contributing factor to the concept of success held by African American males in this study.

Non-Institutional Factors

Non-institutional factors also contributed to the concept of success held by the participants in this study. Images and stereotypes promoted through media, personal financial status, family support and other personal growth due to challenges were significant to how participants defined success. Negative imagery and the messages associated with it have a symbolic impact on the identity of African American males. Stereotypes and images impact the way the participants viewed and expressed their financial status in terms of employment, the role of family support, and their personal growth as they overcome challenges.

Intersectionality. The intersections of race, class, and gender have a profound influence in the manner in which the participants in this study experience negative imagery, financial status, family support and personal growth. Characterizations of African American males as uneducated, lazy, hypersexual and criminals influence how these men are perceived by society and how they perceive each other (Howard, 2014). The participants in this study analyzed themselves and other African American males through the lens of these images and stereotypes. They often provided explanations for the lack of academic success by African American males that aligned with the negative images and stereotypes. They seemed to be unaware that the labels they had ascribed to other African American males were the same labels that created a campus climate were they felt isolated and unwelcomed.

The participants in this study appear to experience a type of intersectionality referred to as "interlocking oppression." McCall (2005) suggested expanding the concept of intersectionality to account for how sources of privilege and subordination can create

the intended or unintended marginalized identity of another. For example, the participants in this study may perceive themselves as privileged because they are succeeding in community college and they position unsuccessful African American males in opposition to their privilege. Interlocking oppression may explain why the participants in this study use negative images and stereotypes of African American males to marginalize the identity of other African American males.

Financial status. Financial status and employment were also affected by negative images. Participants in this study attributed their ability financially take care of their family and their schooling to achieving success and as a barrier to success. In regards to achieving success, they expressed the ability to seek and access necessary resources to help pay for their education, such as scholarships and financial aid, as traits of masculinity. African American males that gained access to financial support yet did not use the aid to pay for their education were deemed "unsuccessful", "lazy" and perceived as not performing masculinity. A successful African American male in community college is perceived the demonstrate the characteristics of masculinity which include the ability to pay for your education with or without aid, financially supporting your family, and meeting the demands of college work all at the same time. Howard (2014) suggested that the inability to pay for college, insufficient financial resources and the need to financially support a family adversely affect the likelihood of success for African American males in community college. Participants noted that it is a struggle to balance these demands yet conquering the challenge of balance is a factor in their concept of success.

Family support & Spirituality. Family support as well as spirituality has been identified as important to the success of African American males in community college (Barnett, 2004; Guiffrida, 2004; McIntosh, 2015). Participants reported that their families played a critical role in their perception of success. More importantly, participants identified female family members as having the most influence on seeing themselves as successful. Mothers, grandmothers, wives, aunts, daughters and nieces were identified as being significant in the process of deciding to attend and stay in college. Although these women may not have earned a college degree or high school diploma, their support and encouragement was perceived as essential to participants' success. Additionally, achieving academic success was a demonstration of masculinity that participants' believed was important to their relationship with supportive female family members.

Participants did mention male family members as being influential perceiving themselves as successful. Grandfathers and sons were identified as being supportive. Fathers were mentioned in regards to being absent. Unknown fathers, imprisoned fathers, and deceased fathers were all motivations to be successful while attending community college. Whether the motivation was to demonstrate "being a man" in the absence of a male role model in the home or to honor the wisdom and expectations of a grandfather, all participants included these relationships and the performance of masculinity as factors contributing to their concept of success.

Daily Challenge of Being an African American male in America

One of the "gifts" of enlisting CRT as the theoretical framework for this study is that the "researcher makes a deliberate appearance in his or her work" (Ladson-Billings, 2000). As the researcher, I am interpreting this gift in a literal sense and will add my

presence to the exploration of the last factor contributing to the concept of success held by the African American males who participated in this study. The nature of the final factor: the daily challenge of being a Black male in America has a powerful influence in what success truly means for the seven men that were interviewed for this study. I don't know how appropriate this is for the protocol of a dissertation, however it is critical that I share this narrative in the most human voice as possible.

Participants shared with me how conflicted they feel about taking night classes. Specifically, they addressed walking in or near the parking lot at night and being considered a criminal or car thief by law enforcement and campus security. They also mentioned the fear of simply walking away from campus a night and being subjected to police interaction that could result in detainment, incarceration, or death. In the wake of so many publicized deaths of unarmed African American males at the hands of police officers, their fear is real and justified. Their fears are shared with family members, particularly mothers and wives. As a mother of an African American male, I am also concerned for the safety of these young men.

When I started interviewing the participants for this research project, twelve highly publicized cases of unarmed African America males killed by police officers had occurred between April 2014 and March 2015. The participants were aware of the killings and understood that they could become a victim at any time. To this end, they spoke candidly and sometimes emotionally about the lack of understanding and care from academic leaders concerning the daily challenges they experience being African American males in America.

As noted in Chapter 4, some participants tailor their behavior at night so that they do not appear as threatening as negative images and stereotypes portray them. They are hyper aware of the burden they must carry to ease the fears of White female instructors and classmates in their presence. This burden interferes with their class work. When assigned group work, these participants avoid off-campus meetings particularly when White female students are in the group. They resent meeting with White female instructors during their office hours. Participants reported feeling like they were being "rushed out of the office because the instructor was afraid" of their presence. They were also concerned that they were not receiving quality time and information from their instructors. The African American males in this study reported feeling angry and exhausted for apologizing for their existence, the need and responsibility to perform to make others feel safe. Acknowledging the strain and emotional weight of the daily challenges of being an African American male does not suggest that these men perceive being an African American male as a burden. One participant summarized that "Being Black" was his motivation to succeed.

The prevailing concept of success held by the African American males in this study was making it home alive, getting through the day without being arrested or detained, and not being accused of a crime they did not commit. They are concerned about negative images and stereotypes of African American men that are used to justify creating oppressive environments and campus climates. In order to challenge or overcome the messages connected to negative images and stereotypes, African American males must perform to make others feel safe. Participants in this study believe that their presence on the community college campus at night is dangerous to their overall

wellbeing and most try avoid it. Unfortunately, they also believe that White instructors, administrators, staff members and peers are uninterested in and do not care to understand how the daily challenges of being an African American male impact their academic careers and concept of success.

Summary

In my research for this study, terms such as "at-risk", "non-completer" "endangered", and "in crisis" continuously came up relating to African American males in education. A limited amount of literature pointed to positive and affirming aspects of African American males in academic environments. The published accounts of successful African American males touted them as exceptions to the norm, particularly in higher education. Although this study did not specifically examine institutional labels attributed to African American males, the intrinsic nature of the labels and stereotypes permeates their concept of success and their experiences in community college. Participants in this study are aware of the negative labels associated with them and the low expectations of their academic performance that these labels evoke. They also feel isolated on campus as a result of racism, stereotypes, and lack of a substantial African American male community on campus.

Media outlets can also affect African American male students in higher education. Participants in this study discussed how the media negatively portrays African American males, which creates bias stereotyping. The negative image cause by the media affects social and academic support from teachers or higher education in general. Resilience, in the form of proving negative stereotypes and media images wrong, appears to be a factor

of protection to help African American males in community college adapt to their academic environment despite adversity.

The relationship between African American males and faculty at community colleges is complex. Interacting with faculty can help encourage and inspire academic success among African American men. However, researchers (Bush & Bush, 2010; Wood 2012) found that African American men perceive faculty in community colleges to be unsupportive and apathetic toward their success. Participants in this study confirmed these findings yet also reported supportive and caring relationships with faculty members. Race and gender play critical roles in faculty-student interaction. Dee (2006) theorized minority students become academically successful engaging instructors of their own race. Study participants validated this claim when seeking mentors and guidance. However, the current study reflects how the overall perception of an instructor can affect African American male students if their influence is supportive. Participants within this current study acknowledged interacting with unsupportive instructors, yet involvement from instructors who demonstrated care contributed to their concept of academic success.

Numerous publicized accounts of unarmed African Americans losing their lives at the hands of police officers has likely played a role in shaping the concept of success for many African American males. Participants in this study shared their fear of the police and how that affects their concept of success. Being a target for law enforcement and the challenges created in order to move through society in this respect has an impact on African American males pursuing their academic goals at a community college. In the wake of this reality, traveling to and from campus without police interaction that could result in their death has become a focal point in the lives of the participants. Performing

to make others feel safe, although burdensome and exhausting, appears to be a pathway to engage with faculty and peers that find African American men on campus threatening. This is also the root of the concept of success held by African American males in community college: making it through the day without police interaction, making it through the day without being accused of a crime they did not commit, and making it through the day without losing their life at the hands of a police officer.

Reflection

As a researcher, more importantly as an African American in the field of higher education I find it necessary to include my reflections on the process and findings of the research presented in this dissertation. As I sat with these men pursuing their educational goals and telling me their stories and concepts of success, I was taken aback at how often they expressed feeling like no one on their campus cared about them, their reality or the daily challenges they experience as African American males. As a practitioner in higher education, I find it imperative that relationships with students and the institution be re-examined to identify practices of exclusion.

I began this research to investigate the concept of success African American males held while attending community college. Giving African American males an opportunity to share their voice and perspective regarding student success was important to me as an African American practitioner in higher education. The participants reported that their concept of academic success went beyond academic performance. Although they understood the metrics associated with academic success and performance from an institutional perspective, their personal experiences outweighed the traditional view of success. When I listened to and analyzed the narratives of their realities, I came to

understand that I lacked the knowledge necessary to transform the learning environment to meet their needs. I have come to realize that a meaningful understanding of student success involves instruction, student services and administration equally. These three segments of the institution must collaborate in order to transform to institution to meet the needs of African American males and every other student in community college.

As I began to write the findings of the research, I found it very difficult to share the experiences and reality of the participants as if they were not human. The institutional practice of simplifying the definition of student success in higher education is a practice of removing the human (the student) from the definition. This is evident in the quantifiable terms and strategies currently used to govern the definition of success. The notion of student success is complex and always in flux. Yet, the concept of success held by institutions of higher education is uniform and static. Positionality in this perspective suggests that entering into education and being successful is a homogenous journey. Clearly, the African American males I interviewed contradict this notion. For them, as I suspect is true for others, success is a personal journey and is realized by the individual. In other words, students know when they are successful and the reality of their success may not coincide with the concept of success held by institutions of higher education.

As practitioners, we need to examine the role we play in students' success instead of defining success for students. Additionally, as institutions move to restructure their identities through revised mission and vision statements, they should also consider how to include concepts of success from the perspective of the student in their identity. The

prevailing question for this researcher is, "How can student goals be translated into institutional language?"

Implications for Practice

In this section, three implications from my analysis and synthesis of the literature are highlighted that may be helpful for educators and practitioners serving African American males in community college. First, the relationship and interaction that African American males have with faculty have a significant impact on their concept of success. Research has indicated that African American males in community college perceive faculty as unsupportive and often find it difficult to forge relationships with them. The participants in this study reported that if African American male students knew that their instructors cared about them they would try harder to succeed. Community college need to be more dedicated in assuring that faculty are supportive when engaging African American males.

In the wake of publicized killings of unarmed African American males at the hands of police officers, college leaders need to be sensitive to the daily challenges African American males face. Along with cultural awareness training, administrators, faculty and staff need to be mindful of the daily unexpected challenges that are indicative to African American males and law enforcement, including campus safety officers. It is imperative that campus safety officers participate in ongoing training regarding racial profiling. . This research has found that African American males try to avoid night classes so that they don't risk walking through the campus parking lot and get mistaken for a criminal. African Americans males carry the burden of performing to make others feel safe and it appears that the leadership in colleges is either oblivious to their

challenges or does not care. Being mindful of the challenges and burdens that African American male students face can help them feel welcomed at the community college.

In order to achieve this goal, community college leaders should provide regular and substantive mandatory training in cultural awareness to help faculty, staff and administrators learn how to and why it is important to work with students from culturally diverse backgrounds. This type of ongoing training should create an environment where all students feel welcomed and included.

In Chapter 4, study participants noted that mentors play an important role in seeing themselves as successful while pursing academic goals. Research has shown the effectiveness of mentorship in African American male's perception of academic success. Participants in this study have gained so much from a mentor that they desire to mentor other young African American males. Some of the colleges that the participants attended have mentoring programs. The participants that engaged in the program found that their academic performance improved. However, some participants found mentors in the peer relationships. They sought advice and support from peers that had completed their education at the community college and moved on to a university. Again, community college leaders should invest in the research and development of mentoring programs specifically for students of color at predominantly White institutions. Mentoring programs aid in the retention of African American males, provide guidance and support and increase their engagement with the college campus. College administrators should be mindful when developing mentor programs. Careful consideration of whom on campus is qualified to be a mentor is imperative. Peers should not be overlooked in this role however; they need guidance and training to be effective in this role.

Lastly, family support and access to resources is important to the success of African American males. Since African American males attending community college tend to be nontraditional students, they don't respond to the efforts put in place to engage traditional students. These men are older adults and often have families to support and needs that go unmet. Campus activities and resources designed to support students are generally formulated for 18-21 year olds who are financially dependent on their families and often unemployed. This study found that these older African American male students often find it difficult to balance work, family life and school. Resources such as child care, reliable transportation and financial aid seem to be difficult to secure. Events and activities that are designed to help students receive assistance for such resources generally take place during hours that nontraditional working students cannot attend due to work or childcare needs. When holding informational events, the college should consider tailoring events to the needs of their nontraditional working students in regards to time and additional available resources such as childcare and family friendly activities and food.

Making an effort to learn and understand how to interact with students from diverse cultural backgrounds is necessary to establish a campus climate where students for supported. Additionally, understanding the challenges indicative to particular student populations and making resources available to them can aid in keeping them on their pathway to success. Family support is important to the success of African American males. Components of how they conceptualize success are being role models for their children and supporting their families. If community colleges took the time to ask African American males how they conceptualize success, the institution could help create a

pathway to success that addresses their needs. Developing an environment for success that African American males helped to shape may increase rates of persistence, retention, and overall success in life.

Implications for further research

This study was not intended to be generalizable to all African American males in community college, exploring their concept of success is important to the discourse of student success. In order to gain more insight into this issue, replication of this study is warranted. Participants to consider are African American males between the age of 18-30, African American males attending a community college with a racially and ethnically diverse population, and African American women in community college. While, this study has identified implications for practice based on the findings of the research and the analysis of the literature there are also implications for further study on several topics.

First, further study should be done on success in higher education and African American males that were part of the foster care system. There are some indications in the literature that as foster youth age out of the system and enter higher education their "voice" and experiences needs to be examined (Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, & Fogarty 2012; Day, Dworsky, Fogarty, & Damashek, 2011; Merdinger, Hines, Osterling, & Wyatt, 2005).

The rate of African American children "aging out" of foster care in 2010 was higher than that for children of all ethnic and racial groups combined. Bryant (2013) noted that by the African American males exit foster care, they've been in care longer than their peers an average of 28 months compared to 22 months for all children.

Research suggests that upon exiting the foster care system, Black males are more ill-prepared academically, are more likely to have histories of criminal involvement, and are more likely to have no employment experiences than their White male and Black and White female counterparts (McMillen, & Tucker, 1999). Moreover, males, in general, have been found to fare worse on indicators of self-sufficiency and personal well-being after leaving foster care (Kerman, Wildfire, & Barth, 2002). Many young Black males transitioning from foster care will have numerous needs in order to be successful adults.

African American males that have come of age in the foster care system and enter college, do so at lower rates than other young adults. How they perceive and achieve success in community college should to be explored. Additionally, the resources that are available, academic and social support and policies that affect their experiences in higher education should be examined.

Another area that deserves further examination is an African American single father. Families are a critical component to how African American males conceptualize success. The participants in this study reported that their families are significant factors in their concept of success. Although, only one participant in this study identified himself as a single father, Black fathers are most likely to be heads of single father households (Livingston, 2013).

The prevalence of single fatherhood is closely linked to poverty and lack of education. Family responsibilities can be liabilities to the success of Black men (Guiffrida, 2004) pursuing their educational goals at a community college (Wood, 2011). A full 47% of single fathers are over 40 years old and 32% of single fathers have some college in their background. However, Black men are often portrayed as running from the

responsibility of fatherhood. Dr. Roberta L. Coles, a White sociologist and author of *The Best Kept Secret: Single Black Fathers*, and *The Myth of the Missing Black Father*, examines social policies and attitudes that make it difficult but not impossible for Black men to parent their children. African American fathers are less likely to marry their child's mother many continue to exercise their parental responsibilities through cohabitation, visitation, financial support, and caretaking. Many African American single fathers refuse the opportunity to give up their custodial rights to their children no matter how difficult the circumstances. These men continue to work and in some cases attend community college while working and raising their children alone. Due to negative stereotypes and social attitudes, many African American fathers find it difficult to access resources for single parents. Currently, research is situated to understand how single mothers thrive at work, in higher education and building community (Coles, 2010). Understanding how single fathers, more specifically single African American fathers, enrolled in community college experience and define success could lead to increased retention and delivery of effective services and resources to help them succeed in higher education.

Finally, an area in need of further research is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Attempting to gain success in society and academic environments where racism and racist events are prevalent can be traumatic for African American males. One participant in this current study openly acknowledged suffering from PTSD. Although he did not reveal the nature of his trauma, he, like other participants, revealed that he is aware of the racism he experiences daily. PTSD is a severe and chronic condition that may occur in response to any traumatic event. African American males have been found

to suffer from race-based trauma (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005). The National Survey

of American Life (NSAL) found that African Americans show a prevalence rate of 9.1%

for PTSD versus 6.8% in non-Hispanic Whites, indicating a notable

mental health disparity (Himle, Baser, Taylor, Campbell, & Jackson, 2009). PTSD may

also be more disabling for minorities; for example, African Americans with PTSD

experience significantly more impairment at work and carrying out everyday activities

(Himle, et al. 2009).

One major factor in understanding PTSD in "ethnoracial minorities" is the impact

of racism on emotional and psychological well-being (Williams, 2013). As noted by

participants in this study, racism continues to be part of a daily challenge in American

culture. Racism and racial barriers have an overwhelming impact on the oppressed. Much

research has been conducted on the social, economic, and political effects of racism, but

little research recognizes the psychological effects of racism on people of color (Carter,

2007).

Chou, Asnaani, and Hofmann (2012) found that perceived racial discrimination

was associated with increased mental disorders in African Americans, Hispanic

Americans, and Asian Americans, suggesting that racism may be a traumatic experience.

Racism as trauma is not generally a single event. Carter (2007) explained that many

minorities experiences of racism is a culmination of traumatic experiences with maybe a

minor event being the "last straw" that triggers a traumatic reaction.

Current concepts of trauma may be limiting for diverse populations. Moreover,

existing PTSD measures typically fail to include racism among response options,

positioning racism and racist events to be categorized as "other" and not fully capturing

the nature of the trauma. This limitation can be problematic for African Americans who may be reluctant to share their experiences of racism with White therapist, who constitute the majority of mental health professionals. African American males may conclude that mental health professionals like community college faculty, staff, administrators and White peers do not understand their reality or deny their experiences. Thus, African American males who seek out mental healthcare to address race-based trauma may be further traumatized by microaggressions, subtle racist slights, from their own therapists (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine how African American males in community college defined success as it relates to three primary research questions:

1. What is the concept of success held by African American males while pursuing their academic goals in community college?

2. What institutional factors contribute to their concept of success?

3. What non institutional factors contribute to their concept of success?

The data collected from interviews with African American males attending community college indicated primary themes in six categories related to those questions:

1. **Almost all participants stated that academic success had nothing to do with academic performance. Academic success was situated in overcoming challenges in an academic environment**: Even those articulated the institutional criteria for academic success did so by indicating they were aware of that measure of success yet it was not their definition of success.

2. **Success in general is more important than academic success:** Defining success in general was more appealing and provided a more accurate perspective of success. In this regard, success is demonstrable via strength, being perceived as being better than a White man, in other words challenging the power of normalcy and demonstrating the heterosexual qualities of being a man. .

3. **The concept of success changes based on life experiences:** Original definitions of success focused on acquiring wealth. As life events occurred and racial barriers continued to exist, the overall perspective of success became more aligned with overcoming challenging situations based on race.

4. **Feeling isolated, positive and negative interactions with faculty and peers contributed to the concept of success:** Feeling alone and unwelcomed based on race has an impact on how success is conceptualized. Positive interactions with faculty members that demonstrated a sense of care and encouragement contributed to the motivation to be successful and lack of peer support of community of African Americans affected student engagement on campus.

5. **Negative imagery, stereotypes, financial status, and family support contribute to how African American males perceive themselves as successful:** Race, racism, identity and masculinity hold the same value for contributing to the concept of success.

6. **Daily Challenges of being an African American male:** A lack of understanding how exhausting it is carrying the burden to always make others feel safe in an environment where the primary feeling is isolation has the greatest impact on the concept of success.

By applying the data collected relative to each theme to the two primary research questions, several conclusions can be reached.

- Academic success is not quantifiable and does not pertain to academic performance.

- A general definition of success is more applicable to African American males because it addresses deeply rooted issues of race and racism. Overcoming challenges that affect the intersections of race, class and gender are more accurate descriptions of success.

- An immature demonstration of masculinity holds the acquisition of wealth as the foundation of success. As African American males gain maturity money is no longer the mark of success, overcoming racial barriers is now the foundation of the concept of success.

- Positive faculty relationships and interactions is the most significant institutional factor that contributes to success. Race and ethnic background are not significant issues if the faculty member demonstrates sincere care for the student's well-being and academic progress. The caring faculty member is perceived as a mentor or a friend. However, if the faculty demonstrates racist behavior or support of negative stereotypes (non-institutional factors) then the student may emotionally and physically withdraw from the campus environment and it becomes a place where success cannot be achieved.

- African American males are very aware of how fragile their lives are as targets of racial profiling. Avoiding situations where others may not feel safe in their presence and continuously compensating for racial barriers that must be overcome

in order to succeed is burden that is carried daily.   For African American males the only concept of success that matters is not losing their life at the hands of police officers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
Outline of Research and Interview Questions

R1: What is the concept of success held by African American males while pursuing their academic goals in community college?	1. Describe your definition of academic success 2. Describe your definition of success in general 3. Has your definition changed over time? If so, describe how has it changed and why has it changed?
R2: What institutional factors contribute to their concept?	4. Describe what life is like at this institution as an African American male. 5. What has been your most significant experience at this community college? 6. How important is campus involvement to your success? 7. What are you experiences with student success programs on this campus?
R3: What non-institutional factors contribute to their concept?	8. When African American men do not achieve success in college, what are the primary factors you think make it difficult to achieve success? 9. When African American men achieve success academic success in college, what are the primary factors you think help them achieve success? 10. Who has played a significant role in your ability to see yourself as academically successful? 11. What role or impact did your family have on your ability to see yourself as academically successful? 12. What role has mentoring played in your life to see yourself as academically successful? 13. What motivates you to do your best? 14. What influences promoting African American achievement are you familiar with in community colleges? 15. What information or insights would you share with other African American males in community college to help them overcome barriers and succeed academically?

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Flyer

APPENDIX C
Verbal Consent

OSU **Verbal Consent Guide**
Oregon State · social, behavioral, and education based studies

Purpose. The purpose of this study is to research how African American males attending community college perceive student success.

Activities. You will be participating in an interview where you will be asked about your experiences in community college and your perception of student success as a community college student.

Time. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes (1 hour).

Risks. There are no risks to you. However, since race will be a topic of discussion, you may experience an emotional reaction.

Benefits. A benefit to you for participating in this research is the opportunity to share your voice and perspective regarding student success.

Payment. You will receive a $10 gift card for your participation in this study.

Confidentiality. Your name and identity will not be used in this study. You will be referred to by a pseudonym (an alternative name) in this study, only the researcher will know your identity. If your identity should accidently be disclosed, there are no perceived risks to you and your relationship to the college and community.

Voluntariness. By giving your consent, you are agreeing to volunteer to participate in this study. There is no penalty for choosing not to participate or for leaving the study at any time. Your consent also gives the researcher permission to use the information you share as intended for the purposes of this study. You may request that any identifying information be destroyed and you are free to remain silent on any topic.

Contact information. If you have questions regarding this study or the research, you may contact Dr. Larry Roper, the principal investigator, at (541) 737-2759 or email him at Larry.Roper@oregonstate.edu.

APPENDIX D
Participant Intake Form

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE SUCCESS STUDY – INTAKE FORM

PLEASE PRINT

Name: _____

Age: _____

Major: _____

Do you identify as African American?   YES   NO

Credits currently enrolled in: _____

GPA (if known):   _____

How many years attending community college: _____

Are you currently employed?   YES   NO

Are you married?   YES   NO

Do you have children?   YES   NO

For Interviewer use only:

Participant # _____   Add Qst _____   Refs _____

Gift _____   Duration _____   Env # _____

APPENDIX E
Interview Questions

Interview Questions:

1. Describe why you are attending this institution.

2. Describe your definition of academic success.

3. Describe your definition of success in general.

4. Has your definition changed over time? If so, describe how has it changed and why has it changed.

5. Describe what life is like at this institution as an African American man.

6. What has been the most significant experience at this community college?

7. How important is campus involvement to your academic success?

8. What are your experiences with student success programs on this campus?

9. When African American men do not achieve academic success in college, what are the primary factors you think make it difficult to achieve success?

10. When African American men achieve academic success in college, what are the primary factors you think help them achieve success?

11. Who has played a significant role in your ability to see yourself as academically successful?

12. What role or impact did your family have on your ability to see yourself academically successful?

13. What role has mentoring played in your life to see yourself academically successful?

14. What influences are you familiar with promoting African American achievement in community colleges?

15. What motivates you to do your best?

16. What information or insights would you share with other African American males in community college to help them overcome barriers and succeed academically?