RETENTION BEHAVIOR AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE COLLEGE—HOW DO AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES MAKE SENSE OF IT?: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Increasing diversity has resulted in more African American male students studying in predominantly white universities. This study focused on the strategies that they employed in order to remain academically successful, preventing drop out from college. Although Historically Black Colleges and Universities persist as a higher educational option for this population, this study focused on the sense that African American male students made of their common experience attending a predominantly white public university in New England. This study employed an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to how the participants made sense of their academic success in their university environment. Guided by the following research question: What were lived experiences of African American males who persist in higher education through to their junior and senior years? Through qualitative inquiry, this study employed semi-structured interview questions. They spoke of their explanations and strategies as to how they remained in this research site. The two superordinate themes emerged from the analysis of narratives including values and belief systems. In this section, this research reviewed attitude of persistence, self-reliance and self-determination as African American males and the subtheme of religion and pressure from family. The next superordinate theme is strategies for academic success. The subordinate themes included pre-college academic preparation, on-campus involvement, network of friends, and family connections.
Keywords
Retention, persistence, academic resilience, academic success, African American male college students, Predominantly White Institution, self-determination of African Americans, drop-out behavior, family support.

Dedication
This doctoral research study is dedicated to my incredibly supportive family. For my selfless husband Araya who never hesitated to prioritize my studies and keep the end goal in mind. To my children, Salem, Meron, and Adonai, who went with me to the library several days per week so that I could study. Thanks for believing in me, motivating me, and making this dream a reality!

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I am also very grateful to Dr. Kimberly Nolan who provided helpful guidance and was very patient throughout my longer than usual dissertation phase. Thank you to Dr. Joseph W. McNabb who gave me feedback and insight that resulted in a more in-depth research study. I would also like to thank Dr. Shirley E. Thompson, my third reader, for her support and expertise as a scholar of American and African American Studies.
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The objective of this study was to interview African-American male students to learn their insights into their ability to retain and achieve academic success in college. The researcher studied students who were juniors and seniors in a particular predominantly white institution. The goal was to find out how this vulnerable population, that is, a population that historically has had difficulty retaining in college managed to succeed. The purpose of this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was to understand the meaning that participants make of academic success as remaining enrolled at a predominantly White institution at least until their junior year. At this stage in the research, the phenomenon of retention was generally defined as remaining enrolled at a four-year college from year three until graduation. Knowledge generated informed higher education policy-makers to enable them to provide support to undergraduates to help with retention in college.

This chapter began with a brief overview of the research related to retention of African American males in a PWI. It provided context and background to the study. The rationale and significance of the study was discussed next, drawing connections to potential beneficiaries of the work. The problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions were presented to focus and ground the study. Finally, the theoretical framework that serves as a lens for the study was introduced and explained. This theoretical framework was educational resilience and the research will use it to show how participants who were at risk overcame obstacles and retained in college.
Context and Background

Context: One goal of education in higher education institutions was for Black males to enhance social and economic mobility (Bush & Bush, 2010). Retention of African American males in predominantly white postsecondary institutions has failed to thrive over the years resulting in their low social mobility. The law Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) was passed to desegregate schools and improve access to quality education for African American children. Unfortunately, many schools remain segregated today and African Americans have not made significant progress in the social mobility that comes from successfully graduating from higher education institutions. The professional skills and career security when African American males attend college was not attained if they failed to graduate. Therefore, this topic was important because of the comparable limitation of success in higher education for this population of students. Few scholars disagree that there is a link between education and social mobility.

Some authors, such as Jackson and Moore, III, 2006, argued that education determined social mobility more now than it had in the past. For African Americans who were descendants of slaves, they could not, in most cases, count on the good fortune of being born into families that were wealthy or inherit wealth from their parents. They did not have this type of social capital that comes from birth, so one option was to get it through education, and in particular, attending college. By graduating from college and perhaps going on to graduate school, the playing field could be leveled with their White counterparts. What could we study to best learn about this process?
By learning how the most vulnerable group of students persisted in college, insight was gained for helping students overall. The most disenfranchised group in American higher education institutions were arguably African American males. They lag behind Whites and African American females in retaining in college. By focusing on this group, policy could be deduced because what works for the least successful group may work for anyone else on campus.

**Rationale and Significance**

The rationale for this study was the researcher’s interest in retention of African American males in a PWI and how it informed policy in higher education. Focusing on this would bring information that would enable colleges to look at this issue with new solutions for encouraging retention. The significance of studying African American males in a predominantly White institution is that the participants must adjust to an environment that does not have the advantages of having a majority or significant population of African Americans. Without this social support, African American males have to face challenges of being away from home, adjusting to unfamiliar environment and food, and having to adjust to life with people that do not share their same culture. They may also face the threat of racism and classism as they deal with White students. And because of these challenges, I want to focus on African American males in a PWI. Here factors for the most challenging environment for the participants exist like isolation. They do not have the benefit of many faculty and administrators that share their background. Without this, their chances for retention in college go down. By interviewing African American male students who have survived in such a risky environment, the research will show techniques and strategies that worked in the most trying of settings.
This study will focus on positive adjustments that African American men have made at their predominantly white institution. “…little effort has been devoted to the examination of productive outcomes that have accrued as a result of the expansion of access (however limited it has been) to PWIs, particularly for African American men” (Harper, 2008, p.1032). Since positive outcomes represent a gap in the literature, I will focus on this area to augment an area of study that has less research. Many researchers have sought the reasons for lack of retention. These included lack of preparation, lack of financial support, lack of focus due to familial obligations, etc. By looking at the problem from a different point of view, data may be gathered that can bring the focus away from the deficits of the students and their backgrounds. Positive data may inform positive action on behalf of predominantly white institutions’ administration and faculty.

The audiences that benefit from the study include the participants themselves, who were given a voice through the research. The university where they study and other universities that have similar retention issues with African American males may benefit. Administrators at universities whose jobs were affected by the phenomenon of retention including-academic advisors, professors, college presidents, admissions officers, etc. were influenced. Administrators that deal with achieving retention behavior in students of other ethnicities may find value in this study, too. The African American community that strives to improve themselves through college education may be impacted from insights given by the participants in the study. All supporters of minorities in America who were allies and have similar goals for African American males-to graduate from college and thrive were affected. This study will offer information that can be used by administrators of students in general so that more students were able to complete their studies in predominantly White universities.
**Research Problem and Research Question**

Research Problem: African American men graduate at lower rates than their White counterparts at Predominantly White Institutions causing lower social and economic progress.

Goal: The goal is to identify what makes African American male students overcome challenges to their academic well-being in a PWI so that they can graduate and improve their socioeconomic status.

**Justification for the Research Problem**

Nevwerez and Wood (2010) wrote that many benefits to higher education exist including having career mobility, greater job security, expanded social networks, and improved employment skills. With all of these benefits to prevent dropping out from in school, it was worthwhile to discover some of the reasons that enable African Americans to retain according to them.

Deficiencies in the Evidence: Studies of African American men tend to be in either Historically Black Colleges and Universities or Community Colleges. Instead, this study will focus on African American males in a predominantly White four-year institution. The research will broaden the context of the discussion of retention of African American males by focusing on a different type of institution. For example, Feintuch (2010), writes Ohio State University is one of a few universities if not the only university, that houses a center for the study of African American males in the context of a major research university. This illustrates the lack of research from the point of view of a PWI on African American males. Many Historically Black Colleges and Universities conduct research on African American men and boys. However, the study would be useful because of the different context of the research.
Main question/hypothesis: What were lived experiences of African American males that show how they were motivated to stay in school?

Definition of Key Terminology

**Term 1** retention-retention is staying in school until degree completion (Hagedorn, 2005).

**Term 2** drop out-drop out is someone who leaves school and does not return to complete their degree (Hagedorn, 2005).

The following section of this chapter will include a description and discussion of the Theory of Educational Resilience which will serve as the theoretical lens for this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Theoretical Framework: Educational Resilience**

According to Luthar (2007), Resilience is a process whereby people who go through adversity, cope and have a positive outcome. Williams and Portman (2013) define educational resilience as the response of doing well in school despite challenges like poverty, racism, and lack of social support. In order to be resilient, students need to have protective factors that enable them to respond positively to the risks that they were facing. Two factors have to be in place for resilience to occur. These two factors were exposure to a threat or adversity and the success of positive adaptation despite obstacles. Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker, 2000, were resiliency theorists who tended to publish together. This study was focusing on Luthar for the research.

Educational resilience is an appropriate theory to study retention with because it shows
psychological reasons why at-risk students have not dropped out of college. It provides a framework for the reasons why African American men who made it were successful in a challenging environment such as a PWI. Educational resilience shows how students can excel in one sphere like academics while not doing well in other areas like social skills. This theory applies to the focus of this study—strategies that African American males were using to retain in a PWI.

Another reason why this theory fits is because it is the researcher’s goal to take a strengths-based, positive approach to looking at the problem of increasing retention and decreasing drop out behavior. Other theories focus on why dropping out is happening. Everything from poor educational background, poverty, violence, lack of motivation in the students were given as reasons for this phenomenon. To learn how to overcome it in the future, this study hopes to elucidate reasons that the participants give as to what kept them in school. Using educational resilience as a background will presume that something inherent in the participant or their environment led to retention in school. Therefore, there will not be any blaming and negativity-instead the focus was on retention behavior. Another gap arises because of the fact that when researching persistence in African American males, researchers in the past have focused on deficit theories. African American males were looked upon as being “unintelligent, incapable and disadvantaged” and therefore unlikely to succeed in college (Eunyoung and Hargrove, 2013). These studies reflect the other approach to studying African Americans in the U.S. This involves blaming the victim and not taking into account the history of slavery and racism in the U.S. Educational resiliency offers a positive affirming approach to how success is achieved in this population, as opposed to what is going wrong. There is a lack of studies that delve into the successful students’ strategies and what positive approaches they took to do well. Educational resiliency offers a way that African American males can be understood as successful students.
With regard to resilience, many studies exist on the K-12 setting since the 1970’s. These studies often times focus on how children thrive in the midst of violence in their community, poverty, lack of support from their single parent or both parents, and other negative environmental influences. However, Williams and Bryan, 2013, wrote that few studies cover successful African American youth and their protective factors and processes. In addition, participants of studies have come primarily from single parent households which were low income. In comparison to these studies, fewer studies deal with regard to Black male students who study in PWIs. Most of the studies on resilience use the concept as a psychology construct used to study young children. Being a study that focuses on college-aged students will address this major gap in the literature.

Different approaches to being educationally resilient included engaging with professors, joining on campus organizations like fraternities, and turning to spirituality for support. Also, pre-college or transition programs gave students extra development that gave them the skills to stay in school. African American students who were found to be educationally resilient were self-efficacious and looked to their academic and social environment for backing.

The support that they received from their environment is called “protective factors” by Luthar (2006) and Rutter (1987). By having protective factors from their family, peers, teachers, and ministers, they were more able to mitigate the challenges, like racism, that they encountered at their PWI. Educational resilience is the process whereby students overcome obstacles and risk to become academically successful.

Rationale: Educational resilience provides a framework for retention of African American males in a university because it offers a process whereby students who have persisted can explain ways that enabled them to overcome academically. This theory illustrates the ability of students who overcome challenges and come out successfully. Other theories focus on why lack of retention
exists and how it is the fault of the students who were unable to retain. However, educational resilience departs from this negative viewpoint and offers the researcher an opportunity to demonstrate strategies that students have developed to maintain positive results in their academics despite the odds.

By focusing on educational resilience as the theoretical framework, the researcher may delve into the reasons why African American males retain. This perspective gives university administrators insight into what works in retention. The research will focus on strategies that have worked in retention, as opposed to the causes of attrition. These strategies will inform programs that can be set up to help prevent dropping out from students who were at risk.

**Critics of Your Theory**

Over the years that resilience has been used in research, critics have said that it is deficient in four main areas. These include ambiguous definitions and terminology regarding resilience, instability of resilience itself, and questions about resilience as a scientific construct. Basically, doubt exists as to whether resilience is legitimate in the way that it is defined and applied. What is the history of resilience and from where did these concerns arise?

Resilience was initiated in the writings of Garmezy. In Garmezy’s research, resilience was shown to be a term that was applied to the children of schizophrenics that did well. Over time, the term resilience was chosen over the term ‘invulnerable’ because it was found out that this state was not fixed. Since then, the theorist that this study focuses on, Luthar, used resilience to show excellent performance in one important area with average performance in other areas. Resilience is used as a process and a characteristic. The particular study focuses on resilience which is the
process of overcoming adversity. It is different from ego resilience. Block in 1980 defined ego resilience as being resourceful and sturdy in character. Ego resiliency is a personality trait. Resilience, according to Luthar, is a developmental process where the person is exposed to adversity. No adversity need be present for ego resiliency. In resilience research, the terms ‘vulnerable’ and ‘protective’ were used to describe adjustment without clear definition. One of the downfalls of resilience research is that terms were interchangeable without clear definition at times.

Besides having vague definitions, resilient children were not necessarily high functioning across different aspects of their lives. For example, Luthar (1991), noted that at risk children may be resilient in academics. However, they may not be resilient in social competence and may exhibit depression or Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. This is one example of why some psychologists do not believe in resilience. Intuitively there should be some uniformity across similar theoretical adjustment domains. However, it is not always the case. Adaptation that is positive does not mean resilience across all fields. These fields were behavioral, educational, and emotional resilience.

In addition to having different assessments between fields, in resilience studies, a limit is the measurement of adversity. When conducting a study, it is difficult to view individuals as having resilience based on their adversity, since adversity is relative. That is one drawback of studies on resilience. But research where resilience is looked at on a continuum may have main effect findings of positive influences to be larger than when the researcher studies interactive effects. Thus different approaches to research with resilience may be applied.

Psychologists agree that resilience is not a static, permanent state. Instead at-risk individuals falter over the long term and do not remain resilient. On the contrary, some studies have shown that resilience lasts over time, but not many studies have shown that result. For
example, Werners, in 1994 and 1995 showed in a study that children that were high functioning remained so over several decades. Luthar, 1998, also wrote that resilience is not necessarily transient.

One reason why psychologists and educators find resilience studies helpful is because one may learn about how people do not succumb under unfavorable pressures. It offers a way to gather and conduct research on solutions for a problem. Interviewing students for this study will uncover information about how they remained resilient and how others may do the same.

The next chapter was a literature review which will elaborate on retention of African American males and educational resilience. The goal was to gather enough information to inform the structure of the research including type of research method, number of participants, and focus of the researcher. This literature review will determine what my main thesis was, and what questions participants will answer to prove this thesis. In order to do this, the research will present a series of claims from Luthar and other resilience theorists in the field. Research was summarized that addresses each claim. The next chapter will help lay the foundation for going into the field.
Chapter Two—Literature Review

This literature review will provide the context for this qualitative study. Many quantitative studies exist that focus on the declining enrollment and increasing attrition of African Americans. However, relatively few highlight the qualitative reasons for retention of African American males from college (Davis, 1994, Terenzini & Pascarelli, 1991). The researcher will explain the reasons why the research problem is significant by drawing out historical and contemporary issues that reflect its relevance. As mentioned before, the study topic is how African American males use their resilience to retain in college. It made sense to write about African American males since they have the lowest retention rates (compared to other ethnic groups) in universities. Because of this, they were not able to take advantage of benefits that may result from college graduation-economic and social mobility. African Americans suffer from several educational disadvantages from elementary school and higher. However, by focusing on the success mechanisms of African American males in the university setting, they were able to tell their story and talk about their strategies. Research will show how they were able to thrive in an academic setting for as long as they have. This was significant to university administrators, professors, and the department of education. The research participants will inform the researcher
of ways to improve graduation outcomes. With this first-hand knowledge of strategies for retention, universities may implement alternative approaches in retention and success programs. Why were these support programs needed?

The history of access and quality of higher education for African American students varies greatly from their White counterparts here in the United States. In the beginning, African American students attended Predominantly White Institutions in small numbers, but as time went on, Historically Black Colleges and Universities were founded and became the main source of higher education for African Americans. The need for support of African American males seemed to be different and greater than African American female students since their retention rates were lower. As a result of these special needs, many colleges and universities have plans in place to support their African American male students. Some support programs may be mentorship programs, living learning communities, diversity classes, and cultural offices or houses that promote African American culture.

The Research Problem for this study is: Black men graduate at lower rates than their White counterparts at Predominantly White Institutions causing lower social and economic progress. The Research Question is: What were lived experiences of African American males who persist in higher education through to their junior and senior years? Based upon these research interests, the literature review will cover three strands. The strands was: the context and history behind access to higher education for African Americans, an introduction to the challenges that African American males face in higher education, and the concept of persistence as applied to an educational setting.

**Background of African Americans at Predominantly White Institutions**
Looking at the background and history of African Americans at Predominantly White Institutions, or PWIs, one must review the access that African Americans had at these institutions at various points in time. The researcher will give an overview of major actions in history and important court cases that resulted in access of African Americans to increase or decrease in PWIs. It will not be possible to review completely every court case, legislation, or executive order that pertains to this topic, but many of them were touched upon here chronologically.

African Americans were prohibited from attending school or even learning how to read and write during slavery. These slaves lived mostly in the South where the states had laws against teaching slaves to read or write (Clewell & Taylor Anderson, 1995). Some learned basic literacy from their masters in order to enable them to serve in their capacity as slaves better. Very few were able to get a formal education. It was not until 1833 that a PWI named Oberlin in Ohio began to openly admit African Americans (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). After the 13th Amendment passed in 1865, northern churches and missionary groups gave money to start about 200 private institutions for African Americans in the South. These institutions were meant to educate African Americans in higher education, but many of them were not universities but were secondary schools (Harper et al., 2009). Forty historically black colleges and universities, or HBCUs, founded between 1865 and 1890 are still functioning today.

In 1862, the first Morrill Land Grant Act brought in Agricultural and Mechanical education and 30,000 acres of land to establish public colleges in every state. This Act supported the notion that higher education should focus on practical arts such as how to farm and repair mechanical things. The second Morrill Act of 1890 mandated funds for “just and equitable” funding of education for African Americans in 17 states (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). This Act helped expand institutions for African Americans that were public.
The access that African Americans enjoyed seemed to be expanding until six years later. The court case Plessy v. Ferguson ruled that segregation was permissible in public schools only if accommodations and facilities were equal (Harper et al., 2009, Purdy, 2013). This case presented a large setback for equality and access for African Americans in education. After a very long time, some 58 years later, the U.S. Supreme Court said that “separate, but equal” and racial segregation is not equal and is therefore unconstitutional based on the Brown v. Board of Education ruling of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). Most specifically, Brown said that racial segregation in public school denies African Americans rights of equal protection under the 14th Amendment (Clewell & Anderson, 1995, Harvey, 2004). Although this ruling was a landmark case and very important for access to education for African Americans, it took an additional ten years and the signage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 for Brown to have a strong impact on higher education. In this law passed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, Title VI of it stated that people cannot be discriminated against under a program getting federal aid. All of the institutions of higher education that accepted federal aid fell under the auspices of this law, and therefore these schools were now forced to give access to African Americans or give up federal funding.

Although this legislation focused on the financing aspect getting African Americans into PWIs, there were some lawsuits that had to do with access in the late 1960’s. This came in response to the lack of enforcement of desegregation laws. In 1969, the department of Health Education and Welfare’s Office of Civil Rights required ten states to submit plans on how they would desegregate their public colleges and universities. They targeted Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Virginia since they had dual education systems. Since the government did not enforce this, the Legal Defense Fund of the NAACP along with a private law firm sued HEW (Clewell & Anderson, 1995, and Harper, Patton, & Wooden,
2009). In the end, most of these states submitted plans that were accepted and put into place. Louisiana did not comply. Mississippi’s plan was rejected and the HEW accepted the other eight. HEW monitored the taking down of the dual systems. This ruling may have contributed to the decline in enrollment in public black universities. Other legal action that worked to desegregate state systems of higher education included Adams v. Richardson and U.S. v. Kirk Fordice.

The 1988 Civil Rights Restoration Act said that discrimination in any part of the university could result in federal sanctions, if the government chose to enforce it at that university. Enrollment in the 1980’s, during the Reagan and Bush years, saw declines in Affirmative Action enrollment. This was because these administrations tested the courts and tried to turn back progress made and because of Bakke (Hall, 2003). From 1982 to 1992 there was a 26.5% increase in college enrollment for African Americans. African American women had gains 4.3% higher than African American men (Clewell & Anderson, 1995, p. 76). In addition to the level of enrollment declining for African American men in higher education, their graduation rates have been low as well.

**African American Males and Graduation Rates**

One measure of progress and success for African American college students is their graduation rate. From this percentage, one may determine how many students were achieving the main goal of attending college besides getting an education-and that is graduation (Garibaldi, 2007, Hall, 2000, Reynolds, 2012). Information may be gleaned from looking at the rates of graduation for African American males and some explanations and remedies was presented here.

“Out of the graduating 39% of African American students, when data is disaggregated by gender, only 34% of African American males graduate with a degree after six years” (Heaven, 2015, p. 36) The number for African American males is about ten points below the general
population of university students. There were several consequences to this situation. First of all, African American men, and anyone who fails to graduate from their college program, will make on average half as much as their counterparts that did graduate from college. (Heaven, 2015) This is a significant financial consequence. Another result of not graduating that is financially related is the debt that they was responsible for. Those students who graduated can use their credentials to land a job that can pay more and help pay back the loans. However, those who do not graduate pay for at least part of a degree that they did not receive (Garibaldi, 2007, Hall, 2000, Reynolds, 2012). This debt that African American students face is compounded by the fact that several come from low wealth families before they attend college.

**Challenges for African American Males in Education**

In the public school system, students become separated according to their socioeconomic status. Those who come from higher income families graduate at a rate that is nine times higher than their lower income counterparts (Hayes, Cunningham, & Courseault, 2006, Jackson & Moore, III, 2006). To compound this problem, African Americans were overrepresented in the population of people living in poverty. This is important as an impediment because the most accurate predictor of graduation rates is the education level and the amount of income of the students’ parents.

In addition to the limitations that coming from a low wealth family places on African American college students, academic challenges begin early on in grade school and high school. One challenge that impacts African American students is the practice of tracking students. They
appear to be put in place to improve the learning experience of children who were either advanced academically or developing in their studies. Instead, this practice segregates students, limits access to a high-quality education, and has lasting consequences on education and job opportunities.

The results of these practices in education may be seen in the differences in graduation rates between races. For example, according to the US Census Bureau, African Americans who were at least 25 years old graduated from college at a rate of 13.7%. However, Whites who were at least 25 years old graduated at 22.5%, a much higher rate. This results in tangible differences in income between graduates with a high school diploma and graduates with a college degree. The average weekly salary of a high school graduate is $668, while the average earnings of a college graduate is $1,101. To increase the number of African Americans that were graduating, efforts have been made to increase the numbers who were enrolling.

African American Males in Higher Education

Recruitment of African American Male College Students

Many who work in the area of college recruitment of African American males believe that the numbers of them who gain a college degree do so as a result of increased financial aid programs and education from Historically Black Institutions. However, some researchers believe that the lack of recruitment of African American males to college is intentional and results from a concerted effort to prevent the progress of the Black race in America (Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol and Brown, 2016). Ogbu and Acre support this philosophy, known as academic colonialism, that purports that lack of access to college, academic media like journals, and education funding from
the government intentionally limits the progress of minorities in the US and abroad. The goal to suppress the minority population by the majority population is based on racist historical factors. This leads to a decreased number of African Americans being recruited into higher education.

Leaders in the National Association of College Admission Counselors, (NACAC), believe that several steps may be taken to increase the number of African American students who enroll in college. One way to increase enrollment of African American males is to have admissions officers from colleges improve their communication with important stakeholders such as high school students, parents, counselors, and teachers. The main point would be to raise awareness of the requirements for admission to their colleges so more students was prepared to apply and succeed. For example, the admissions officers can raise awareness on what courses were needed for admission overall and requirements for selective majors, what grades were acceptable, and the range of standardized test scores that the college accepts (Naylor et. al., 2016).

Another approach to improving college readiness involves college preparatory programs that support African American students with their goal to prepare themselves for college. By exposing high school seniors to the rigors of college work in an environment that would not negatively impact their college GPA, students may develop study habits that will serve them well later. Many admissions offices and their colleges have made an effort to increase African American enrollment by forming partnerships. These partnerships, between the four-year colleges and community colleges, streamline the transfer process. Things like improving the ease of transferring credits and marketing the opportunities that the four-year college offers to the students may augment the numbers of minority students. Updates and criteria for admission that were more inclusive contribute to an increased chance for academic opportunities for African American males (Jackson, 2012).
The process for choosing students must reflect the effort to increase recruitment of African American males. For example, the traditional method of deciding whom to admit includes a heavy focus on standardized test scores and grade point average. By not making the college’s range of acceptance in these whereas, African American males may be rejected for admission right away. Another approach that may yield a more diverse freshman class will include an admissions process that includes more accurate predictors of success for this group of students. For example, in addition to SAT scores, college admissions officers may look for other predictors of success. These may include signs of motivation, maturity and resourcefulness that was needed through the transition to college. Extracurricular activities, jobs, and family obligations reflect some capabilities of prospective students (Hall, 2003, Purdy, 2013, Naylor et. al., 2016, Shin, 2008). The history of African Americans in higher education depended first on access to the majority of higher education institutions.

**Predominantly White Higher Educational Institutions**

In the past sixty years, the legal and political landscape continued to shift to affect access to higher education by African Americans. In the 1960’s, the Civil Rights Era, progress for access of African Americans at PWIs grew. For example, in 1961 Executive Order 10925 signed by President John F. Kennedy started the effort to encourage employers specially to help overcome the prior discrimination that African Americans and women experienced (Clewell & Anderson, 1995, Hall, 2003, Purdy, 2013). Subsequently, Executive Order 11246 of Pres. Johnson, looked to fix exclusion of women and minorities in housing, government, education, business and work. Affirmative Action, what this legislation became known as, in higher education grew from the late 1960’s to the early 1970’s. In the 1980’s, the number of college graduates increased, and this included some African Americans.
Affirmative Action helped increase the access women and minorities had in higher education. However, in 1978 the Regents of the University of California v. Bakke case dealt the first major blow to this effort. In the ruling of this case, the Supreme Court said that there could be no more racial quotas in admissions, but race could be used as a factor for achieving diversity (Hall, 2003, Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). This was because the defendant, Bakke, said that he was denied admission because he was a white male and the school had reserved 16 out of 100 seats for minority students (Clewell & Anderson, 1995). Schools used Bakke as an excuse to cease minority recruitment programs. The numbers of blacks, especially in law and medical schools declined.

Legislation in the late sixties focused around providing opportunities for the lower economic class to attend college. This was important because many African Americans fall into this category, too. In 1965, for example, the Higher Education Act provided for the country’s first college scholarships. It also made work-study, a government subsidized on-campus work program for students, part of federal education policy (Clewell & Anderson, 1995). In addition, TRIO was funded under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 which helped minorities. Talent Search, Upward Bound were some of the programs that were created that helped low income students’ transition to college. Several other pieces of legislation provided financial support for economically needy students.

Another very important piece of legislation is the 1972 law that established the Pell Grant, or a scholarship for economically needy students to assist in attending college. As can be imagined, this legislation affected enrollment positively for many African American students and White lower-class students. Enrollment at private black colleges increased by 90% for African American

**Strategies**

Besides providing financial support, several other strategies exist in order to support the retention of African male students. One study emphasized the salient factors that lead to success of African American males including “the importance of education, access to resources, having a mentor, and being resilient as significant contributors to their graduation from college (Brooms, 2016, Warde, 2008). Brooms, 2016, writes that having self-awareness, peer relationships and utilization of campus resources helps African American males persist in college. More specifically, Brown (2006) proposed that engagement in on campus organizations and clubs helps to improve attachment to the university and increase African American males’ sense of belonging. Fraternities and Sororities play a role in helping African American students feel more involved in campus life and less marginalized. Participating in social, academic, and service groups on campus that have African American males as members help to lessen alienation, increase the students’ networks, and get students involved in their communities (Brooms, 2016, Karkouti, 2016, Tinto, 1975, Tinto, 1982, Tinto, 2012).

Broom, 2016, did his research on Black Male Initiatives, or programs designed to support the retention and graduation of African American males from college. One finding was that BMI groups offered a safe place for these students to gather and make connections. They gave them a sense of belonging and the students developed their identity as African American males (Broom, 2016, Reynolds, 2012). Another important aspect of the BMIs he studied was that it introduced the students to academic support within and outside of formal university options. For example, the
African American students encouraged each other to prioritize their grades and form study groups with one another. The BMI groups helped the participants to stay motivated, set higher standards for themselves, and be more results-oriented (Broom, 2016).

Another benefit and result of being in a support group for African American males in college is that a group identity forms. This enables the students to develop a group consciousness and their cultural capital, something which is very important for their community (Franklin, 2002). To have unity and accountability means bonds exist that encourage members of the group to push forward, even when things get difficult. Another result is that the group helps others that struggle. By having this support system, the students realize that the decisions that they make to be a successful student or not affects the others in their BMI group.

These BMI groups allowed the students to identify and utilize support mechanisms both inside and outside of the classroom. It provided an opportunity for the students to build bonds in a place that was not hostile. They built a home away from home and used this structure to improve their grades and enhance their persistence. They were able to build up useful social capital which students from other racial/gender backgrounds could more easily tap into (Dotterer, McHale, Crouter, 2009, Broom, 2016).

In addition to BMI groups, institutions have to examine their campuses so that racial hostility is lessened, and inclusiveness is augmented in order to increase the enrollment of African American males. To the end of diversifying and supporting this group of students, colleges need to address lack of sufficient financial aid for needy students, update admissions policies to improve diversity in the incoming class, add mandatory classes on diversity and inclusion, and facilitate hiring, promoting and granting of tenure to faculty of color (Karkouti, 2016, Spradley, 2001).

Conclusion
Institutions may address improving retention by improving the policies and structures on campus that affect the climate for African American males. This includes dealing with ways to make students of color adjust more comfortably to the social and academic environment of college. To achieve this, colleges must increase the enrollment of minority students, make faculty and administrators of color more present on campus, and facilitate interactions between white and African American students to promote understanding. Another common approach is to work directly, sometimes one-on-one with programs that offer academic, financial, spiritual, and social support to young African American men who were transitioning to college. This consists of mentorship programs, volunteerism, cultural clubs, academic counseling. All of the approaches above work for different students in different settings. It is hard to say which ones have a greater impact over the others; instead, a combination of solutions applies.

Persistence in Higher Education

Background of Persistence

What defines resilience in an educational setting? Educational resilience relates specifically to a student’s performance academically. Several other aspects of resilience exist- they consist of personal, physical, social, and relational. However, this research will focus on how college students adapt to their academics using this trait.

Educational resilience is the ability to respond well in school despite personal and environmental obstacles and challenges to success. Being resilient results from the utilization of a student’s resources and traits in an educational setting to succeed (Wang & Gordon, 1994). Some traits that determine educational resilience include intelligence, sense of self-worth, and coping styles. A student’s resources that influence their educational resilience may include their
relationships with helpful adults, academic school services, and social organizations (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010).

In order to research educational resilience, one must know the components of what makes a student resilient. Two factors must be present. Students who were educationally resilient have faced risk and/or challenge sometime in the past or present. In addition, protective factors which have assisted these students in responding successfully to the risk factors must exist. For example, protective factors may include personality characteristics, school climate, and teacher expectations (Dotterer, McHale, Couture, 2009, Masten & Reed, 2002).

**Persistence in African American Male Students**

Protective factors in the academic persistence of African American males involves certain distinct factors. This results from their history as slaves in the United States and as objects of discrimination currently. One source of strength and motivation to stay in college is their fathers or father-figures in their lives. “More than 75% of the Black men attending college linked the decision to obtain a degree to their fathers” (Olsson, Bond, Bums, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003). Family influences African American male students to set and achieve strong academic goals and to be resilient when encountering difficulties (Olsson et al., 2003).

**Challenges Towards Retention for African American Males**

Statistics show that 34% of African American males graduate within six years from four-year universities (Anumba, 2015, p.36). Based on this statistic, African American males in
particular face difficulties in the classroom that may be related to their background. Fergus, Noguera, and Martin, 2014, wrote that African American males face negative experiences that were related to their race daily. For example, their educational opportunities were limited in the K-12 grades and they have a lack of access to advanced educational classes. African American males face challenges and risks that most other students do not have to deal with.

To name a few of some of the challenges that African American males face, they were subject to more tracking, more school discipline, more teachers that were ill prepared, higher suspension rates, and more referrals to special education. In addition, their teachers often have very low expectations for them. They wind up in classes that do not prepare them for college such as honors classes and Advanced Placement courses. Without this college prep, the chances for African American males to prevent dropping out from in college go down because they were not prepared to succeed. Not graduating presents a problem in particular because people who graduate with a bachelor’s degree tend to earn twice as much as high school graduates who do not have a college degree (Anumba, 2015, p. 37). Other impediments exist that get in the way of the graduation of this sector of the population.

The challenges that African American males face in college were similar to the difficulties that STEM minority students face in college. For example, one problem is that they do not have the social capital that the other white students may have. Many were either first generation students or the first person in their family to attend college. Next, working with the daily tension of being a minority at a PWI and not feeling entirely welcome can be a distraction and source of stress. Finally, many African American males come from high schools where they received insufficient academic preparation for their college classes (Hall & Rowan, 2000, Jackson, 2012, Reynolds, 2012, Toven-Lindsey, Levis-Fitzgerald, Barber, & Hasson, 2015). Several difficult realities get in
the way of the persistence of African American males in college; different stakeholders have different approaches to the problem.

**Strategies for Retention Behavior in African American Males**

Several actions can be taken to deal with this concern. Many approaches exist, so the researcher will discuss a few in this section. One key place to start would be having K-12 schools improve how they prepare students for college level classes. Colleges can partner with these feeder schools more closely to help decrease the number of students who need remedial education and the number of students who do not have the curriculum necessary to attend college. Colleges can also connect these students to tutoring resources, educate them on how to be engaged in the classroom, and help to demolish any concerns they have about their academic ability.

"Developing spirituality" and "developing social responsibility" must be a part of programs for African American male students (Howard-Hamilton, 1997, p.19). Counselors can help the males develop spiritually simply by promoting them to seek out the religious affirmation that most fully encompass their beliefs and self-identification. Spirituality and freedom were directly connected in the African American culture. Participating in organized religion may provide needed stress relief, supportive relationships and advice, structure, and alleviation of the effects of racism. Part of being innately complete is related to having a healthy spiritual life (Heaven, 2015). “In addition to familial and peer support Black men at PWIs do appear to embrace spirituality as a success factor” (Eunyoung & Hargrove, 2013). By offering African American male students who attend a PWI an opportunity to become a part of a religious community, their abilities to counteract the daily challenges that they encounter improve. Church or mosque may sustain these young men at a time when a positive outlook, strength, and increased peace were welcome.
Several components contribute to the success of students, in addition to involvement in religious practice. For example, on campus activity involvement in African American males is a fundamental component in student success (Tinto, 1975, Tinto, 1982). Student Affairs professionals should be particularly diligent in promoting young males to participate in housing activities, student organizations, and other extracurricular activities. These activities and organizations help to improve their communication and leadership skills while forcing them to interact with others who may be different from themselves (Cuyjet, 2006).

To encourage communication, one support program for minority males in a community college setting found helpful approaches to this issue. For instance, “black men place greater effort and focus in their academic studies when faculty and staff communicate validating messages to them, when campus services were accessible and effective, and when black men exhibit help-seeking behavior” (Johnson, Williams, & Wood, 2015, p.25). Validating messages support the students when they deal with micro aggressions on campus and when they come from communities and families where few African American males have graduated from college. It particularly helps when positive messages come from respected and concerned faculty and staff. In addition, if African American students make use of helpful academic and social services offered by their institution, this makes a difference in their chances for success. The school must offer services that offer effective assistance. Also, the students must not hesitate to seek them out. Some examples of assistance that work focus on leadership training, year-long orientation programs, and career exploration support. To identify more about the needs of African American male students, some colleges have found it helpful to survey students to identify areas of need in intervention programs and services that were designed for their success. Once information is gathered, programs like
mentoring and service-learning programs may be enhanced based on data to better meet the needs of these students (Brooms, 2017, Warde, 2008).

Another identified strategy to support the success of African American male students is to have engagement between their institutions of higher education and their high schools. By partnering with feeder schools, colleges can ensure that their incoming students were better prepared to meet the academic challenges that some students face. By addressing areas for development that the students have early, the chances that they was able to transition more quickly increases (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010, Jackson, 2012, Johnson, et. al., 2015, Williams & Bryan, 2013).

In order to achieve long-term success, college administrations were noting that more than just academic support must be provided. For example, for some African American male students, instruction on how to balance financial, academic, and social/familial stressors exist. When so many priorities compete for the attention of students who strive to focus on their grades, the result can be that something other than academics becomes most important. If schools supported students who were at risk and need guidance, then this would be an important part of their overall strategy to partner with students. Clearly, the goal is to succeed academically, but looking at the larger context of the students’ lives has been necessary in addressing these challenges, too.

**Conclusion**

Due to the institutions of slavery, segregation and institutionalized racism in colleges in the United States, African Americans had limited access to higher education. This access improved first with the introduction of Historically Black Colleges and Universities through the Morrill Act which allotted land for Black Colleges to form. Legal action led to African Americans being
permitted to attend Predominantly White Universities, in particular, Brown v. Board of Education of 1954. Access continued to wax and wane depending on American leadership preferences and lawsuits. For example, Presidents Johnson and Kennedy with their Executive Orders tried to equalize opportunities for African Americans in education and employment. Although cases like Bakke gave colleges a chance to limit their active recruitment of African Americans, laws like the Higher Education Act of 1965 opened up doors for minority students who needed financial assistance. Legislation that authorized federal Pell Grants offered help for African Americans that had limited income.

Once gaining access to higher education, African Americans, especially male students, experienced difficulty being recruited by predominantly white institutions. For those who started college, many African American students dropped out for reasons that included a hostile racial environment, lack of financial support, low expectations set by professors, and lack of academic preparedness overall. To address these challenges, some PWIs have implemented more strategic methods to recruit minority students, increased availability to need-based financial aid, set up programs that address academic and social integration, and have tried to increase inclusion on campus.

How have African American male students experienced these PWI efforts to increase their chances for retention? One main goal for this study is to gain insight into how these participants have used their resilience to succeed. What has been most effective and how did these students feel about these strategies? This qualitative study aims to indicate what support mechanisms and people in the students’ lives did to enable them to remain in college and how they responded to their efforts. The researcher hopes to use the voices and interpretation of these African American males’ interviews to illustrate how they have lived in order to retain in college.
Chapter 3- Introduction

The retention of students throughout their college education remains a current problem for many universities, since a significant number of students that enroll do not graduate, even within six years. This problem is more prominent in the African American community where approximately 20% graduate within four years. Thirty-eight percent of White students graduate within four years (Brewer and Picus, 2014). The statistics tend to be lower for the fewer African American male students (compared to African American female students) that attend college. Students that have been successfully recruited often do not graduate impacting the university’s bottom line. Several authors who have done research in this were able to find variables that contribute to the problem. (Batts, 2014; Cadet, 2008; DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004; Graham, Frederick, Byars-Winston, Hunter, & Handelsman, 2013; Hagedorn, 2005; Tinto, 2017) They have looked at pre-college factors such as high school GPA, SAT scores, parents’ education levels, and socioeconomic status. They have also looked at factors that occur during the college experience, like mentorship programs and the amount of interaction with professors. Studies have shown that students who have a history of being educationally resilient, or able to respond positively in difficult circumstances, did better in college than those who were less resilient. Luthar (2006) posits that certain protective factors enable certain young adults to be resilient. This study will focus on her theory and writing with regard to retention. In particular, the
author will write an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis which deals with the meaning that African American males make of attending a predominantly White university in the Northeast and prevent dropping out from occurring.

**Research Question**

The main research question was “How do African American males that were juniors and seniors with a 2.0 GPA or higher at a predominantly white university make sense of their experience persisting in college?” The goal of the research was to understand how African American males explain and make sense of successfully navigating through an undergraduate degree at a predominantly white university (PWI). This research question will enable participants to describe how they feel they were able to excel in college given their minority male status. There is a great deal of literature on retention, but this research will focus on the point of view of African American males. Most literature focuses on the perspective of different types of participants.

**Qualitative Research Approach**

For this study, the researcher was using a qualitative approach. Through this meaning making, the significance that the participants emphasize in their explanations of retention was explored. Social Constructivist or Interpretivist research was used because the point was to get at the worldview of the participants (Creswell, 2013). What and how they see the phenomenon of retention behavior in higher education was the point of the research. In this manner, the subjective point of view will matter the most. The researcher will not start with a theory as to what or why
the participants view as the reason why they prevent dropping out from in their university. Instead, data was gathered from several participants and based on what they have in common, a theory will arise at the conclusion of the research (Creswell, 2013). This is referred to as having an inductive approach and it empowers the singling out of the particular participant’s point of view (Creswell, 2013).

Another aspect of the qualitative approach is that it does not focus on causal relationships, but instead deals with the quality of the experience. If this were a quantitative study, the researcher would be focused on something like how much resilience effects retention quantitatively. Instead, this will deal with examining each participant’s case in depth and interpreting their interpretations (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). To this end, the researcher will not focus on explaining or the truthfulness of the participant’s meaning-making. However, the point was to understand their experience as they describe it.

To accompany the qualitative method, one appropriate strategy of inquiry that was used is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flower, and Larkin, 2009). IPA was used initially to study health psychology. Now it can be used to see how people perceive phenomena. Interpretative phenomenological analysis encourages study participants to make sense of life’s experiences. This study will use this approach to ask participants to make sense of preventing dropping out from college. IPA comes from various theories.

IPA consists of three philosophical components: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. Husserl, who invented phenomenology, encouraged researchers to use it to focus on the experience itself. It deals with how experiences appear to participants (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This strategy seems fitting for this study because the goal is for the participants to make meaning of a particular phenomenon from their point of view. The study will focus on a
human experience—that of preventing dropping out from, and what it means to the study’s participants (Forrester, 2010).

In a phenomenological study, participants speak of their perception or subjective interpretation of a common phenomenon. Their ideas were not confined to a particular scientific theory (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). Their thoughts and their response to the phenomenon makes their case. The theory behind the research is inductive or data-driven (Forrester, 2010). IPA researchers try to understand what it is like to be the participant in this experience. Their objective is to interpret the meaning of the participant’s world (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). There is a manner that the researcher will go about to obtain the meaning from the participant interviews.

This method in IPA is described as being “double hermeneutic” because the participant makes meaning of the subject first. Then the researcher decodes this meaning to see things from the participant’s perspective. Hermeneutic lends itself to the interpretative activity that the researcher will follow to get at the essence of the meaning of the experience. A small number of participants were chosen. This will enable the researcher to have an in-depth, time-consuming analysis which will result in a deep examination of the phenomenon. Choosing the number of participants is based on how deep the analysis of each participant’s case is, how much meaning can be gathered for each participant, the amount of comparison desired, and the natural limit placed on availability of participants. Also, time constraints of the researcher and participants was a factor (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). All of these factors was taken into account when deciding how many participants to include.

For this study, to be in line with other IPA research, 8-12 participants was chosen (Smith et. al, 2009). There was a homogeneous sample of African American males. They was selected
purposively; or a defined group that is relevant to the research problem (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). The goal was to get to the essence as to how African American males use their resilience to prevent dropping out from a predominantly white institution. By using IPA, the participants were able to express the meaning they make of not dropping out from college like someone from their particular background. The research will focus on how resilience impacts the participants’ experience which prevents them from dropping out of college.

In addition to phenomenology and hermeneutics, idiography is another aspect of IPA study. It deals with the study of participants as individuals as opposed to as a group. Specific claims were able to be made about the individuals studied in an idiographic study. Claims about the population, for example, would not be able to be extrapolated from an IPA study (Forrester, 2010). The goal was to have rich description, meaning not just descriptive responses, but responses that interpret retention behavior and what it means to the participants in their own words. The researcher will use this information to understand their experiences and sense-making.

**Participants**

Since the researcher was using Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis, there was a phenomenon that is being studied that all of the participants have experienced in common. Usually eight to twelve people participate in the study in IPA. This goal of having a detailed study was more likely achieved with a small number of participants (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). African American male students between the ages of 18 and 23 years old. They were full-time students at the research site and were in their junior to senior year in college. These students will need to have at least a 2.0 GPA. No one under the age of 18 was included in the study. Only legal adults who were able to give informed consent was chosen for the research. Once the proposal is approved, the researcher will reach out to recruit participants.
In order to reach these participants, an email was sent from the researcher’s student account to the emails of African American males who were in their junior year or higher and have a GPA of 2.0 or higher, as obtained from the admissions and/or registrar’s office. This email will describe the study and ask if they were willing to participate. A five-day deadline to reply was included in the email. If a group of about eight to ten does not volunteer, then the researcher will contact the Director of the ALANA/Diversity Office to see if he or she will make referrals. In addition, the researcher will ask to use the Director’s name as someone who recommended the potential participant.

Since there were usually few participants in IPA, the researcher felt that having eight to twelve students would offer enough data to make the study meaningful given the topic of retention. In this manner, the points of view of eight to ten people will lead the data to show certain themes. They will determine how a group of people see and draw conclusions from persisting at their college. If a student drops out of the study, this will still give a sufficient remaining number for the study. They will have to identify as being African American and non-Hispanic.

Open-ended questions with follow-up questions was used (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). This method increases the chance of introducing topics that were unexpected. However, this is the method that IPA researchers use most to enable the participant to speak about their experience from their point of view and freely. The alternative is to use a strict interview schedule which would help the researcher stay on topic but would not develop the thoughts of the individual’s direction in telling their story.

In addition to open-ended interviews, doing research in the natural setting such as the home, hospital or school, lends authenticity to qualitative research (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). It is preferable that the researcher use original questions, methods, surveys and tools.
will not use borrowed instruments, like surveys, but will focus on the uninterrupted flow of answers to prompts from the researcher. Using original interview methods, researching in the natural setting and using a small number of participants were some of the factors that identify this study as an IPA.

Site

First approval was sought and received from the Institutional Review Board at Northeastern University. Then, the researcher was using purposive strategy so that participants meet the description of African American male students who attend a particular PWI that is public, non-profit, nationally and regionally accredited university in Massachusetts. The goal is to choose a university that meets this description that is not located far from the researcher’s home for convenience. In addition, a site that has a sufficient number of African American males to interview must be chosen. African American students attend predominantly White universities mostly now, so it is significant for the researcher to study this population in this setting (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Nettles, 1988). The purpose of choosing a predominantly White institution is to see how African American males use resilience to prevent dropping out from in an environment that is not easily described as familiar. By choosing a Historically Black College or University instead, it could be argued that the college environment may be more supportive for retention for African American males. For this reason, the site was a predominantly White institution.

Research Design
The ideas of the African American male upper-classmen drove the content and conclusions of the research. They were all either juniors or seniors, and they were current students in the same State university in the New England area. Since they all identified as African American, they all shared the experience of how they were able to be academically successful in their interview. The researcher taped an interview with each participant enabling him to describe his feelings and strategies that led him to effectively attend college. In this way, the qualitative data gathered was used to discover converging and diverging themes.

Another important aspect of doing a qualitative study is that depending on what is learned from the interviews, the researcher can tailor follow-up questions to the participants. By doing so, one may be able to gather data about areas of interest. When using quantitative data, one’s data is static and there is no way to get this fluidity in doing research. In particular, the researcher cannot get at what the participant makes of the phenomenon. What do they think and feel about retention? Qualitative research enables the participants to express themselves.

There is a lot to be learned from an interview such as one’s thinking and feeling concerning their experience in their university that cannot be gleaned from looking at their GPA’s, for example. Looking at historical data over a ten-year span, for instance, will show patterns of outcomes for African Americans, but it will not illuminate the motivation and obstacles that they faced to persist in college. This study aims to deduce why African American males were able to prevent dropping out from in college. Their strategies for success and methods for dealing with challenges was highlighted. As a qualitative study, these goals may be easily met.

Data Collection
The researcher hopes to soon identify a gate-keeper at the university that is willing to assist in getting approval at their institution. The email addresses of African American males from the admissions records of those who self-identified was requested to recruit students. An email will go out to these students to recruit participants. In order to gather data, there were 9 students who interviewed face-to-face. The conversations were recorded with Call Graph, a recording program for MacIntosh computers called QuickTime. A transcription company typed up the interview data. The transcription company’s web site is http://www.rev.com

To interview the participants, they was asked several open-ended questions that get at the heart of the phenomenon. Rich, detailed, first person accounts of retention was the goal of the interviews. The interviewer will engage in active interviewing and will ask in-depth, semi-structured questions (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). The participant was allowed to lead the interview as much as possible so that what is most important to them may come to the surface. At first, there was an email to educate the participants about the study and to get their consent. (Please see Appendix A.)

While conducting the interviews, other goals besides obtaining rich data from the participants would be to gather reflections on the interviews. The researcher will take notes pertaining to the content, language and context. These reflections may add more meaning to the interview transcripts. In addition, notes may be taken about the interviewer’s personal thoughts and reactions. This will help to separate out interviewer bias when writing up the study.

While conducting all of the interviews, another objective was to gain the trust of the participant. This will facilitate truthful interviews that were ripe with description of the phenomenon. In order to gain trust, the researcher will warm up the participant with basic questions before bringing up private or sensitive issues. Next, prompts was used to encourage the flow of
conversation. Focus will remain on the thoughts and memories so that the researcher can gain the individual interpretations of the participants (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). Once all of this is achieved, the main interview will last about one-hour minutes. It will serve to ask deeper questions. The researcher will pay attention to non-verbal communication during all of the interviews. During the first and second interviews, the researcher will take notes concerning what further questions come to mind for follow-up. In addition, probing questions was asked based upon what the participant brings up. This was how the interviews will remain focused on the meaning-making of the participants (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). After the interview, the researcher will show the participant the study content for their section for member checking to make sure there were not any objections.

Participants’ names was changed by the participants or researcher to pseudonyms. To protect the participants, titles or other identifying characteristics of participants was removed. No other researchers was part of this study, but the primary researcher and dissertation advising team who will have access to all drafts.

**Data Storage**

Electronic data from the interviews and journals was kept on the researcher’s computer in a password protected place. The hard copy data-like transcriptions was kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home. An electronic backup of the data was kept separately. For transcriptions, my advisor and reader will have access if they need it to guide me. Besides, the data transcription company will have to sign an agreement not to share the information with others. The interview and other data from the participants and administrators was deleted once the dissertation is approved.

**Data Analysis**
The researcher will not begin with a theory as to what the respondents had in common, instead, she will go through and assign descriptive codes throughout the transcripts. This will happen by first listening to the recordings while reading the transcripts to check for errors and omissions. Then, to familiarize the researcher with the content and to get the gist of what the participants said, the transcripts was read a second time. For the third reading, notes was made in the left-hand margin that were descriptive in nature (Forrester, 2010). The point of these notes was to describe in short phrases, called descriptive summaries, what is being said by the participants.

After the third reading, the transcripts were read again this time to make initial interpretations. This includes the issues, events and feelings that surround retention for the participants. This will enable an understanding of what retention means to the study’s participants. These initial interpretations was written in the right-hand margin of the transcripts. These notes were kept in case one would like to see the data from which the interpretative themes is being derived (Forrester, 2010).

The next step is to find connections between the initial themes to distill them into meaningful phrases. This is called clustering themes. Some steps include summarizing the data, condensing important meaning, noting which themes stand out or recur, then looking for relationships between the themes (Forrester, 2010). This will lead to a narrative of what this interview tells us about the meaning of retention.

Once these initial themes were clustered, it is time to write emergent themes. The researcher will work with the initial notes to try to condense the transcript and the initial notes. The goal is to maintain the sophistication of this data while showing the relationships and connections between the initial notes (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Organization and interpretation were both important in this stage of the analysis. The themes take shape as the
researcher interprets the participant’s original words and thoughts. Each theme is a convergence of what the participant says and what the researcher understands these words to mean.

After reading and re-reading, doing initial noting with descriptive comments, doing linguistic comments was the next step to add conceptual comments (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). This will focus on the participants’ understanding of retention. The researcher may use one’s own understandings of the topic as a framework to offer meaning of key events to participants. Being able to relate to what experiences have led to certain feelings may open up meaning of the phenomenon. This meaning may be captured next in emergent themes.

Emergent themes emerge when the researcher works with blocks of the transcript and tries to reduce it into themes that involve relationships and patterns. The information that was gathered from the initial noting is incorporated in this step.

The links between these emergent themes were then connected. This happens once the emergent themes within the transcript have been established in the order in which they came up. This is done by taking the list of initial themes identified, determine if they support or contradict one another, then draw up final themes. This set of themes is meant to show an understanding of the participants’ sense-making of the phenomenon and the connections between the larger themes from the transcripts. Several steps occur between the interview and the interpretation or analysis of the participant’s contributions.

**Trustworthiness and Verification**

To address trustworthiness and validity, four major areas must be addressed. They include credibility which deals with how true the representations of the participants were in the study. Next comes transferability where the research can be applied in other contexts.
Dependability is when the study can be replicated. Lastly, confirmability was discussed. This happens when the researcher does not let her motivation or bias influence the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

**Credibility**

According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle, 2010, credibility occurs when the participants agree with the way the researcher represented them in the study. In other words, the researcher should ask, have the research results accurately represented the feelings, thoughts, and actions of the participants from their point of view? An accurate representation can be achieved by having the researcher spend a considerable amount of time in the field capturing meaningful data. Another way credibility was achieved is through member checking. Through this process, participants was emailed the transcripts of their interviews at least once so that they can check it for accuracy.

Credibility also deals with the accuracy of data from different sources (Lodico, Spaulding, and Voetgle, 2010). This is referred to as triangulation. For example, emails that participants may write that were part of the study that describe their experience of preventing dropping out from college must corroborate with their interviews. Different sources may not be conflicting to the overall theme of what the participants answered.

Part of Credibility would be analyzing interviews for the following characteristics: Were several interviews conducted that could be compared? How likely was it that the participants were telling the truth? How unusually optimistic were the stories that the participants told, perhaps leaving out valuable but personal or embarrassing details? Since a large part of IPA is getting to the meaningful nature of what participants feel about the phenomenon, all of these things must be considered. If not, the data may be too superficial to deduce a hypothesis. One way that the
researcher will obtain these things is by spending ample time in the field. This will give opportunities for overcoming original preconceived notions, build trust with participants, and learn as much as possible about the context and background of the study (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006).

Through Negative Case Analysis, the researcher looks through the interview data in an IPA study, and looks for information that contradicts the main hypothesis (Vodico, Spaulding, Voegtle, 2010). If this data is found, the hypothesis may be altered. For this study, the dissertation readers will offer advice on whether or not the findings and themes were grounded in data.

Transferability

By giving enough information about the study, the researcher hopes to make it theoretically transferable. The goal will not be to generalize the study into other studies. The researcher will describe in detail the background and context of the participants in the study. This will include the description of the culture of the participants. In addition, the description of the institution of higher education including setting and interactions with the participants was described (Vodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle, 2010).

A rich, contextualized analysis of the interviews of the participants was provided. By giving this information, other readers can decide if the study is transferable to people in similar contexts as the study participants (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). This study on retention may be able to shed light on wider contexts of other participants.

Dependability

This area refers to the ability to replicate the study given similar participants and methods and receive similar results. In order to achieve this, the researcher will describe the goal of the study, the strategy taken, how data was gathered in the field, and an evaluation of the success of the research’s goals (Shenton, A. 2004). The researcher will explain the data collection procedures
and analysis methods. To preserve dependability, the interviews were recorded via Skype and a digital recorder. The data was preserved until the research is published. By following these steps, future researchers may be able to conduct a similar study to gather more information and build on current findings (Lodico, Spaulding, and Voetgle, 2010).

**Confirmability**

Having an audit and triangulation was already mentioned. In addition, reflexivity was part of this study. There was two dissertation readers other than the main researcher. These two readers may help to prevent the research from being impacted by the researcher’s bias (Shenton, A., 2004). To identify decisions made about the research and analysis, the researcher will write down background and feelings. With regard to the topic of retention, the researcher will continually separate from the research methods and results. By keeping a reflexive journal, the researcher will keep track of why decisions were made and how. What is happening with the logistics of the study was recorded, too. The researcher may keep track of their values towards the study in the reflexive journal. Lincoln and Guba, 1985, recommended such a journal to help with confirmability. It is possible that some ideas from the journal may be published with the study to inform the reader of the author’s motivations.

**Potential Research Bias**

As for researcher bias, the researcher has some commonalities with the participants. The researcher and participants were both of the same race and went to a predominantly White institution in Massachusetts. In addition, the researcher had to rely on resilience to assist with retention as an undergraduate. The researcher’s background includes working in higher education for fifteen years at business graduate schools in admissions. My interests have included access and
retention of African Americans. The researcher comes from a middle-class background and grew up in a two-parent, African American household in the greater New York City area. The researcher’s coping mechanisms with regards to retention may be similar to the participants. The researcher needed to bracket their viewpoint and emotions when analyzing their data. This will make the analysis of the data more objective. The goal was not to insert the point of view of the researcher or subjective interpretation into the voices of the participants. The way that this was accomplished was to first write down the researcher’s sense-making of their experience, and then be careful not to duplicate the researcher’s feelings while interpreting the data of the research project. My analysis was reviewed with my dissertation advisor to make sure the interpretation of the data is not equal to the researcher’s experience.

Limitations

As for potential threats, the choice of a qualitative study and IPA in particular makes the number of participants limited and therefore that amount of data small. A quantitative study can easily accommodate many participants. This lack of scope may present itself as a threat of this study.

The sample of African American males may not be completely homogeneous. For example, some African Americans were new to the U.S. and come from Africa and the West Indies. Another characteristic not taken into account is that in addition to immigrants, first generation African Americans were also part of this group. Several may say that these groups need to be selected out in order to better understand how and why each group may retain in college.

The limitation of this study is that the number of participants may not be generalized to the university or other universities. This is linked to the choice in writing an IPA study that calls
for fewer participants with deep analysis of each person’s experience. By writing an IPA study as opposed to a study with a different research method, the chances of administrators drawing conclusions from the study may be smaller since IPA studies were less well known and have fewer participants. It is possible that university officials may not want to draw any conclusions or take specific actions due to the scope of this study. Some may be more comfortable applying the results of a more common methodology-quantitative or narrative as compared to this IPA study.

Summary

This study involves closely examining the thoughts and feelings of African American males who attend a predominantly White institution to learn about how they experience retention. Most specifically, the researcher would like to learn how resilience is related to their success in not dropping out of college. For this study, a qualitative approach was used by the name of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Although this method is founded in Psychology, it was applied to this education topic. The method for gathering data and analyzing it was reflective of IPA. The conclusions drawn from the data was determined after reviewing the data several times and coming up with descriptive codes and then initial and final themes.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis was to find out the meaning that African American male students made of retaining in their predominantly white university. IPA was used because participants could give a personal account and make meaning of how they
were able to successfully reach their junior or senior year in college. In this way, participants could
tell first-hand how they experienced academic success in college through an open-ended interview.
These interviews included learning about the participants’ educational and familial background,
history of interests in college academics and clubs, and academic and personal challenges faced.
The researcher, by examining their interviews, could interpret their responses and draw out major
commonalities. From this, participants provided information on how they achieved success and
their interpretation of it.

The nine participants generously shared their experiences concerning their thoughts on how
they were able to overcome challenges. They reflected on this as well as how they were able to
prevent additional difficulties. They gave examples of life experiences that made them more
resilient. Two distinct over-arching themes emerged after analyzing the data and those themes are
presented in this chapter. In order for a theme to be presented here as an over-arching theme, a
minimum of six out of nine of the participants brought it up as a topic in their interview. The first
theme was values and belief systems. The first subtheme explored how an attitude of self-reliance
and self-determination as African American males influenced their academic success. The second
subtheme focuses on how their family and religion helped them persist.

The second over-arching theme, strategies for academic success, has four subthemes and
they are: academic preparation before college, on-campus involvement, network of friends, and
family connections.

Themes and Corresponding Subthemes by Participants (Anonymized Names)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timothy</th>
<th>Anthony Takashi</th>
<th>Elie</th>
<th>Spongebob</th>
<th>Rex</th>
<th>TYRJ</th>
<th>Juice Papi</th>
<th>Christopher</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values and Belief Systems</td>
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<td>Attitude of persistence, self-reliance and self-determination as African American males</td>
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<td>Religion and family</td>
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<td>Strategies for Academic Success</td>
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<td>Pre-college Academic preparation</td>
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<td>On-campus involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Network of Friends</td>
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<td>Family Connections</td>
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These two main themes emerged after analyzing the data and those themes are presented in this chapter. Each main theme will be described and then the subthemes will be explored. These subthemes will be broken down into components and they will be summarized. Throughout the sections on each of the subthemes, quotes from the participants will provide supportive evidence. An effort will be made to use these quotes to directly express how the participants felt in their own words, followed how it was interpreted as important by the researcher. Insight learned from the subthemes will then be included. Lastly, an analysis summarizing the themes will be included.

**Values and Belief Systems**
This first super-ordinate theme is values and belief systems. This dealt with the attitudes, mindsets, and perspectives that these African American male students brought with them into this academic setting. The researcher heard how they viewed themselves, interactions with their family members, and society at large. These influences had consequences on their higher education choices and experiences, especially those that influenced their academic success. In this section, the subtheme of self-determination, self-reliance, and persistence in the face of difficulty will be explored. In addition, the second subtheme of the impact of religion and strong family pressure to prioritize success in school will be examined.

**Attitude of persistence, self-reliance and self-determination as African American males**

Values that participants shared included their determination to succeed, despite challenges that presented themselves. Adversities included academic failure and temporary expulsion from school, personal illness, illness of family members, financial troubles, racism, and an insufficient number of African American male role models. In response to these issues, participants often felt the need to be independent and self-reliant in order to not appear stereotypically in need of assistance and deficient. Juice Papi, when talking about how he felt studying in his PWI said:

> And then so it's like, when people see you struggling, it makes you feel worse about yourself because you don't want people to see you struggling. You want people to see you strong. You want people to see you succeed.

They did not want to come across as African American men who were weak or incapable of handling the classes or social pressures of attending a predominantly white university. By doing well in college, they could prove to society and to themselves that African American males can
beat the odds and graduate from college. In order to accomplish this goal, they wanted to tap into their inner strength and were less apt to seek traditional, outside support services from the college. This type of resilience where they overcame setbacks while turning to alternative means for support was common.

Working independently and relying on oneself presented itself as a logical solution for some. One participant, Anthony Takashi, said:

I'm very more of an individual where I always feel the need that I need to succeed. No matter what, no matter what my circumstances are. I just always need to succeed, because nobody else is going to help me succeed.

Anthony felt determined to do well in school. He also felt compelled to do it alone since he did not see any option for him alternatively based upon his experiences in life. For him, difficulties in life in the past had to be overcome by one’s own hard work and determination. Therefore, it made sense for him to approach his academics in college similarly.

One factor in choosing self-reliance when handling academic challenges was the impact that stereotypes and racism had towards African American males. In their perspectives, they did not want to reinforce negative viewpoints of students from their background. By admitting that they were having difficulty academically, they felt that this would validate what some non-minority professors thought of them. In particular, coming across as someone who cannot handle the situation himself as an African American male was important for him to avoid. Anthony Takashi stated, “Yeah. Yes because I don't like to show like I'm always failing. I hate, I hate that feeling.” When someone holds a negative and unjustified opinion of you, he felt, providing them with evidence to reinforce this false generalization is defeating.
Anthony Takashi expressed dismay in fulfilling stereotypes and another participant, Juice Papi, also spoke about this predicament. The need to figure out how to succeed in college alone meant for him the manly thing to do. He said that it was part of growing up and being mature. In addition to being concerned with how outsiders would view his need for assistance with his classes, he was very concerned with pride, his self-esteem, and the negative opinion of people in the African American community towards getting help as well. Juice Papi, in his interview, admitted,

Um, you don't really always wanna show that side of you because you don't know want to be deemed weak. You know what I mean? You, you wanna be. You wanna be that strong image of a black man. ... that you always see. You know what I mean?

Um, or that you want everybody else to see.

Since African American males have a greater chance statistically of dropping out of college, the pressure to not fail is intense for these students. Juice Papi continued:

They can give you suggestions, they can give you the best of their advice based off their perception. But their perception is not your perception. So at the end of the day you need to make your decision and that's what makes it so difficult.

However, they present in a difficult position because although they know about resources such as free tutoring, by taking advantage of these resources, they fear loss of pride, ridicule, and the reinforcement of negative stereotypes. As a result, the participants decided to solve academic problems by getting help from other African Americans or worked independently.

Another point that participants shared was that when they do try to seek help, most people who do not share their race and gender, offer advice which tends not to be applicable nor effective. They feel like their identity and circumstances as African American males in a predominantly white institution are so unusual, that few faculty and administrators can relate to their experiences
or anticipate their needs. This leads to frustration. When the researcher inquired how they felt about their lack of a significant number of role models, One participant, Juice Papi said, “It becomes so easy to just suppress yourself. You know what I mean? And just, just deal with it all on your own.” From this interview, it became clear that being self-reliant was not a preferable choice. Instead, it offered itself as the default after facing other options that proved unpalatable or futile. Participants’ responded by motivating themselves to counteract discrimination and stereotypes. The need to maintain manly self-esteem was paramount.

The reluctance to seek help, even in a crisis, was illustrated by James. He failed his classes and was asked to take a break from school. In response to the disappointment that his mother had in him, James decided,

But I'm really hard on myself and it's like, ‘Don't ask for help,’ like I was, I was going to do it myself. I can do this. I've got this. I'm the F (grade) right now but I got this. I'll make it happen.

Hoping to overcome predicaments in college by themselves came from a reluctance to initially reach out to others for assistance. These participants realized that the resources such as tutoring existed and knew how to access them. The fact that James was aware of the resources and knew that they were free was surprising to the researcher who thought that he did not take advantage of them out of ignorance. Almost all of the participants knew about various means for tutoring and academic support. They made a conscious decision not to access them.

Sometimes they felt that it would not be helpful. James described the tutors’ explanations as being too similar to that of the professors. Also, he would have to sacrifice too much of his pride and self-reliance to accept outside help. It was more important for James to demonstrate to his mother and to himself that he was not going to be a disappointment. He would go on to turn things
around and as he said to the administration upon his return, “’Please, like, I can't get kicked out of school, please.’ So, eventually, I appealed it. And since that day, every semester, I made the Dean's List.” This quote showed that James had the ability to turn around what seemed like a desperate situation independently. To be able to go from being academically dismissed to being consistently on the Dean’s List was noteworthy to the researcher.

The concept of resilience as a result of not wanting to feed into negative stereotypes of society resonated with participants and surprised the researcher. The researcher chose the profile of African American males because they were unique to other types of students. As a group, they struggled the most to be academically successful in college. Hearing about this need to recoup and maintain pride and self-esteem because of who they were, African American males, illuminated why they tended not to ask for help. This approach, although it did not result in failure for these nine participants, often results in less than favorable outcomes for other African American male students. The pressure to be what most people think you cannot be, seemed to weigh heavily on their shoulders. The need to prove to society that they could be successful in a higher educational setting was extremely important to the participants. Also, they really wanted to make their families, communities and themselves proud.

Even without seeking significant amounts of traditional support, these nine participants used their resilience to help sustain and motivate them. In the case of SpongeBob, he dealt with a medical condition as a student. However, he persevered and was able to successfully make it. He stated,

There were times, you know, there’s times I go through depression. Um, and it took a toll, let's say multiple semesters. But I always just try to tell myself, you know,
‘You're getting to the end, and I'm towards the end right now, so. You know, you have to go through that stress and that struggle.’

For him, he was determined to overcome the obstacles that he faced with the refusal to fail. He acknowledged the difficulty that being a person who suffered from depression caused him as a student. Despite this, SpongeBob decided that persisting through this obstacle was something that he had to do. SpongeBob was determined to complete his studies, no matter how difficult it was for him to overcome his illness. He reached inside to find the strength to accomplish the meaningful goal of graduating from college.

All of the participants displayed persistence in their undergraduate careers. Rex, dealt with the serious illnesses of both of his parents, almost simultaneously. Even though he had to deal with distraction and disruption in his support system, he asserted,

You know, you have to take some things into your own hands and keep pushing forward and not just give up. So that's something that I realized in the middle of going through that, which was a big lesson, which means you just can't...just because something is happening, doesn't mean you just stop. So that was (a) big lesson to learn.

For these participants, the choice to give up when faced with considerable impediments did not seem appealing. They preferred to press on and focus on the goal of graduating from college. Even when faced with these extraordinary circumstances concerning his parents’ illnesses, Rex continued in college and will be graduating soon.
TYRJ was another participant who drew a correlation between his negative societal experience with racism and his ability to motivate himself in college. He spoke of an example when his mother was disrespected by youth who mocked her accent while they shopped.

Yes! Seeing the way that they treat my mother in society, like, I think that's what really gets like, my drive and my passion to really fight a lot of the stuff that goes on because it's like, man this is crazy, like, I was raised to respect my elders first and foremost,…And from that point on, I think I just learned how to apply anger and that passion to most everything else.

TYRJ gave a specific reason why he is motivated to do well in college. He lived through the racism that was directed at his mother primarily and was angered by it. Now, he feels motivated to live by the values his mother taught him and will use his education to fulfill his goal of becoming a lawyer one day.

These three ideas of persistence, self-reliance and Black male self-determination caused participants to motivate themselves through poor grades, uncertainty in majors, sickness, family problems, racism, homesickness, and other common complications of college life. Relying on themselves helped them to persist. They chose this approach for several reasons: to shatter negative stereotypes of African American men, maintain pride, and make their support network happy.

Religion and Family

Faith and the academic and career expectations from their families motivated participants to succeed. Some talked about how their faith helped to motivate them, offered hope and made them more resilient during their college years. Eli noted,
Um, I grew up in like a religious ... not a religious family, but a follower of Christ. So, like I believe in like a higher power. So, I'm not really worried about if I ... if I go to school or I don't go to school. It's all gonna figure itself out. So, I'm not really stressed about it ...

Many of the participants felt that an opportunity to overcome problems would present itself because of believing in God and seeing how their families worked hard to achieve. Eli may not have had a clear-cut plan as to how he would meet the tuition bill that was unaffordable, but he and his mother felt confident that a solution would arise because of their belief system. This helped him to avoid the pitfalls of stressing out about something that he could not control or immediately remedy.

Juice Papi said that he became closer to God because it helped him to make it through college. He said that at first, he felt ‘frustrated’ with God for the difficulties of life. Later, he understood how important being spiritual facilitated meeting college pressures. Juice Papi articulated that “everything happened for a reason, and um, you know, just thinking about things in the bigger picture, that kind of gave me the extra motivation, extra strength to just keep going.” For both Eli and Juice Papi, belief in God enabled them to have less stress and more optimism that obstructions in college life would be successfully overcome. They remembered larger and more complicated troubles being overcome in their lives before, so through their faith, it was easier to envision positive results in college. Therefore, they were less apt to give up. Problems that appeared insurmountable, became manageable with their faith.

Another participant, Rex, turned to religion to sustain him through college. He felt that it provided answers to life’s difficulties and gave him strength to take responsibility for challenges that he faced. He explained,
And then not having control over anything, you turn to religion and, don't get me wrong, religion, I really take my religion seriously and I love God. I believe, you know, everything that comes along with that, but there is that lesson that I said. You know, you have to take some things into your own hands and keep pushing forward and not just give up.

Some participants found religion to be helpful in accomplishing their goals. They valued a personal, direct relationship with God in which they prayed about their circumstances. Several used their faith to alleviate anxiety that came from academic, social, and financial difficulties. In addition to belief in God, the pressure to succeed from their families made participants motivated to excel. Few of the nine had father figures in the home. But on the other hand, their mothers, siblings, and extended families supported and encouraged them to try their best in college. They felt accountable to their families because of the sacrifices that they had made to send them to college. Also, they wanted to do well to set an example for younger brothers and sisters and community members. James felt the pressure of his familial situation. James said,

And like the fact that I'm the oldest in my family and the first in my family to make it that far and this far in college ...... it was like ...Yeah, it was like, you also have like a load on your shoulders, especially I have a little brother, and I was like, ‘I've got to lead the way for him.’

If he failed, then he would have felt that he let down his parents and his brother, not just himself. This proved to be a hard position to be in. Comparatively, other students had their parents or older siblings to pave the way for them when they attended college and graduated. Participants told the researcher that even if they went to their parents complaining about trouble with the
schoolwork, they would only suggest speaking with the teacher or tutor. They were unfamiliar with other resources, expectations, or the structure of their classes in the university, which made it harder to understand what or who may be of assistance. Lack of knowledge of his academic environment from his family increased the stress of being in college. Younger siblings looked up to James as an example of how to do well in college. He needed to succeed for his own future, and for the benefit of his family, too.

Juice Papi elaborated about how his feelings for his parents affected his college experience. He did not want to disappoint them and feared what they would think if they knew he was struggling to do well in college. Other participants expressed this combination of worry of disappointing their parents along with fear of how they would respond if they knew that they were not doing well in their classes.

But, even him, it was just like, this just like the, it's, it's kind of hard to say because my parents were, they, they definitely like disciplined us, um, growing up. My Dad kind of, like he, I don't, I don't wanna say like he was mean, but it was just like, he, he would yell a lot. So, it was just like, that's kind of why, I went, going to him as much, he was like, he was that intimidating factor in the household. And then, um, so even now, it was like, oh, if they see me struggling they're going to be so mad, you know if they know what I'm really doing here they're gonna be so mad -Like, how am I going to tell them that I failed this.

Culturally, some of the participants came from homes where their parents and close relatives were disciplinarians and they expected them to excel in college. This upbringing made life more stressful as they encountered academic difficulties. Sometimes, as a result, they were less apt to consult their guardians for fear of how they will be judged. Granted, this dynamic shows
up in several other minority and immigrant cultures in the United States. However, in this particular phenomenon, African American males are under family pressure for different reasons. Not only are they some of the first students from their families to make it to college, but they are working against the legacy of high drop-out rates for males in their community.

TYRJ explained that for him, the pressure to do well in school was intense and came from his mother, his relative that he lived with. He asserted that,

All like African, Caribbean, Haitian, all, you know, black parents, pretty much want their kids to be something that is like the elite. Like if it's not a doctor, it's a lawyer- or an engineer. Those are your three, that's it. Everything else is like- Don't come home.

For TYRJ, the pressure to succeed is common in his community of African Americans. Clearly, his mother is not the only parent that wants her son to go farther than she did. Since she did not have the opportunity to attend college, the completion of TYRJ’s degree is all the more meaningful to her. Rightfully so, she links her son’s educational advancement to his overall chances to improve his status in life. This quote illustrates how narrow her paths for career success are with only three professions considered desirable, lucrative choices. This thinking, according to TYRJ, is pervasive in the African American and African diaspora. Mainly for this reason, participants all majored in STEM or Math-based majors and worked hard to please their families.

Specifically, most all of the participants majored in engineering. They felt compelled to study in the sciences because in their experience, few African American men tend to be successful financially if they pursue these majors in college. One participant, Eli expressed how he thought about this when choosing to attend college. He said, “Because not a lot of people of
color can say they've graduated with an engineering degree, let alone a college degree. So, statistically speaking—... it's like a giant achievement.” Since Rex was given the opportunity to study in college, he wanted to make the most of it by studying engineering and focusing on graduating. The choices that participants made to attend college, persist through difficult circumstances, and choose difficult majors all were influenced by who they were as African American men in a predominantly white university and society.

This drive to be successful for themselves and their family members was also illustrated by Anthony. He said,

All the above because my parents have you know very high expectations for me. My brother being like the genius of the family. I'm his older brother so I need to even though I'm not as well academically rounded as him, but I need to graduate and get that degree. I need to get out, you know, and get my money and make sure this is what you gotta do to for you to succeed.

Anthony concerned himself with setting an example for his younger brother to follow. Participants did not only have to meet the expectations of parents, but they also had to pave the way for younger siblings to follow.

Besides having high goals for themselves, other factors motivated the participants to study in majors where they were more likely to get high-paying jobs after graduation. He faced financial challenges to cover the cost of college, so Anthony needed to seek employment in a field that would help both himself and his family. Despite the fact that all of the participants attended a public university, many of them described financial troubles that they faced each semester as they received a new tuition bill. Several participants said that although their counterparts at private
universities paid much higher tuition, they still faced constant struggles with insufficient resources to finance their public college education. This difficulty caused their relatives to work several jobs to support them. As a result, the pressure from family was even higher because they knew that not only did they have to just set an example for younger siblings, but they also had to make the hard work of their families worthwhile.

Pressure to succeed in college seems much higher for these participants. They have to shoulder the responsibility of demonstrating that they can be productive, reliable, intelligent students like all students. Unfortunately, for them, they felt more compelled because they lacked enough role models and wanted to dispel negative stereotypes that they faced throughout life. Their parents and younger siblings needed for them to do well, albeit for different reasons. Several stakeholders in their lives needed them to take advantage of the opportunity of a college education, in order to further themselves financially, their families and their communities. By coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, most of them had a lot to overcome. In the next discussion on overarching theme two, their methods and strategies for achieving this feat will be examined.

**Strategies for Academic Success**

The nine participants used these attitudes and values to develop strategies and sources of support that worked effectively for them. Some approaches seemed more prevalent and important to them given their identity such as the incorporation of support from family and friends from similar backgrounds. Other strategies for success appeared more universal to students of all cultures, such as the desire to involve themselves with various on-campus organizations and jobs and the participation in college classes before freshman year. The researcher chose to discuss two traditional strategies and two unique ones because these were the two most prevalent and also
because it demonstrates how the participants utilized a combination of strategies for academic success.

**Summer School/ Afterschool Academic Programs**

Many of the participants transitioned well into their college years. They attributed this to the experience and skills that they gained through advanced classes in high school, afterschool programs, and pre-college summer school and work opportunities. The theme was that since they were academically prepared and made some friends in their summer school program, they felt more prepared to face the different environment of college. Of course they still mentioned the adjustments of living away from home and being responsible for their academics and personal chores on their own as something they had to learn how to do. The theme showed that not all students had a difficult time transitioning to college, particularly in their first year. By studying in advanced classes and summer programs on campus, participants mostly adjusted academically well. This theme interested the researcher because of the expectation that students that persisted first struggled in their classes upon arriving to college. Actually, these participants, with a couple of exceptions, hit the ground running because of prior exposure to college-level courses.

For example, Rex mentioned,

Um, coming from the school that I came from, it was a pretty easy transition. It just felt like I was going to high school again because high school was, um, very good at preparing students for what they'd expect in college. Um, they made sure with a lot of the AP courses in order to simulate what it would be like in college and um, other than that, it wasn't a very difficult transition at all.
Several participants thought that academics was not the greatest obstacle for their retention. Distractions such as wanting to attend parties, the need to work more than one job in order to pay bills and maintain close family relationships all competed for their time. At least the academic portion of their freshman year was not as daunting. The participants came ready and with some study skills and exposure to college level work to achieve on the college level. Preparation improved their chances for overcoming a hard challenge; adjusting to academics during freshman year.

In addition to college-level courses, the participants gained an introduction to the field of engineering the focus of the pre-college, summer program. They spoke of making friends during this experience and then having familiar faces to speak with when the real school year began. By having this program beforehand, participants formed social bonds that they could build upon later on. Surprisingly, this did not take long. This program that they attended lasted about one week. However, they were able to meet people with similar interests and backgrounds in a smaller setting, so when school began, they had taken advantage of the smaller number of students to meet new people. This aspect of this theme fascinated the researcher because of the belief that summer programs would need to last a considerable amount of time, such as a month or longer, in order for them to be impactful. By learning that even one week made such a profound difference, that means that fewer resources of time and money may be needed to support students who are transitioning to college.

Timothy told me,

I did attend a summer program. And, this summer program, um, you know ... it was, like, an exposure to my major, so this summer program, within its schedule, goals was, like, to expose (those in) attendance to what their desired major is. And
so, this ... this program exposed me to bioengineering, so, definitely, summer and
that was, like, the only summer program through the school, that I attended.

Besides familiarizing incoming freshman with the campus, each other, and the format of
college classes at their school, this pre-college program also exposed the participants to different
STEM majors. This increased their understanding of fields like Math and Engineering and helped
them narrow down their exact major. Being able to explore different science fields helped to
familiarize participants with the nuances of the different types of STEM majors and how they led
to unique career paths. The process of choosing a major that is in line with a student’s abilities and
interests may be frustrating with inadequate information and a lack of familial experience about
college. Timothy felt that this summer program had multiple benefits for him and enabled him to
transition easier to higher education. By facilitating the transition to college by supporting these
major academic decisions, several of these participants felt that their ability to persist increased.

Christopher pointed out how the summer program before college influenced him
differently. He outlined the benefits,

Just overall just getting to know each other as well as the faculty. And getting
familiar with the campus, too…I actually am good friends with, uh, the majority of
the students (from) there. Um. And I believe most of them are still here to this day.

Christopher said that the faculty from the summer program also taught in the year-round
college program. For this reason, he familiarized himself with them before the real school year
began, once again making the transition less intimidating. Christopher points out the importance
of having friends, even before the school year started. Some of the participants described how
happy they were to see that some of the people they had met over the summer would be living in
the same dormitory with them in the fall. The importance of this sense of network as a benefit could not be overemphasized by participants. In the next subtheme, the role of connections to the university and retention will be demonstrated.

**On-campus Involvement**

Many times throughout the interviews, participants told of the impact of relationships with their faculty, administrators and friends on-campus. The focus was often on how relationships with friends supported them in their desire to become successful students. Anthony Takashi said it clearly,

Okay. What I can definitely say is um, the people I've met here. Because I've met, I've met like, genuinely beautiful people, like beautiful people and it's like— And that is definitely like helped me throughout all of my past four years. Like friends-wise. Friends, Friends and like faculty…I've met genuinely nice people who are actually really willing to do whatever [crosstalk] for you to help you. Like a great support system here.

Although the concept of relying on oneself and achieving in college on one’s own was explored in the first over-arching theme, this differs because the people that the participants turned to were from similar cultural backgrounds. They were quite interested in being a part of the African American community and sought out fraternities, academic clubs, and cultural clubs that focused on their heritage. Although insular, these means proved to be effective for them because they felt welcome. They had nothing to prove and felt that those that they chose to associate with and reach out to for help had confidence in their abilities. In this quote, Anthony Takashi speaks of his network at school like family members and sounds very appreciative to have them in his life. Gratitude for supportive friends was pervasive in the interviews.
Eli felt that having certain friends could change how well you did in school also, but because of different reasons. By adopting the good study habits of close friends, knowing when to work on one’s work and when to relax became an easier choice.

Life is a giant teamwork process in a sense that you’re always gonna be talking to somebody, working with somebody. So, um, if you could find close friends that you know have great habits, even just to talk to, and share ideas, and tell you that, you know, that could sound better, or you should probably do it like this, or I don't know how to do that, but d- I do, so, I could show you how to do it ... So, it's a teaching and giving experience at the same time.

In this example, Eli demonstrates that it was not that he was not humble enough to accept assistance and ideas from others. He appreciated the need for him to work with others and learn from others. However, because of his life experience, he just felt more comfortable choosing study partners that were also African American.

Eli defended his position by saying,

So, that's another aspect, especially for engineering majors, because there's not a lot of African Americans in engineering. So, like it's kind of hard, you know, depending on where you come from to feel comfortable asking other people for help or feel comfortable, you know, branching out into a different friend group that you're not really as like comfortable with.

Despite this obstacle having few African American male colleagues in his major, Eli and most others heavily engaged themselves in close friendships and clubs. Branching out into relationships with white students as friends and study partners seemed complicated for them for
various reasons. However, they managed to get through college successfully in their own way, by not straying far from their communities, but also by joining in and sharing their academic experience with other African American male students.

Many of the participants actively participated in events through the ALANA House on campus. This organization offers students of all races a place for academic and social support. Several spoke of the staff there as being genuinely concerned individuals who sought to help them in any way possible to succeed. They even offered low-cost outings to cultural destinations which offered time to bond with other students and administrators. Through these opportunities, participants grew close to the administration and felt that they looked out for their best interests. Juice Papi spoke about how they impacted his college phase.

the ALANA house here is very helpful because if it wasn't for the ALANA house in, in, in terms of like the programs that they've started up and the, and the trips and everything like that, um,...I probably wouldn't have been as motivated to get involved. Which was a very big thing, I wanted to remain involved especially being on E-board.

The E-Board that Juice Papi referred to was a position of leadership on campus. Not only did the ALANA House on campus provide a safe place for him to be himself and meet others who were like him, but he felt empowered to take on leadership positions on campus.

It is important to note that some of the participants joined groups regardless of the background of the people in the group. They felt that the benefits of joining on-campus organizations outweighed the need for them to be with predominantly African American students. SpongeBob thought that since he was African American, he had a right to join any group he wanted
to and did not let others dictate his choices for clubs. Spongebob disclosed when asked for advice he would give others coming to college with a similar background,

So, definitely my advice would be again, just be strong. You have the support system, and if you feel like you don't, just go around. Join groups. That's what I'll say to, join groups that are more to your, more to your um, to your ethnicity. More to who you are. Even if it's not to your ethnicity, join groups that you feel like if you wanna join a computer science group, go and join a computer science group. If you wanna join um, singing group, go ahead. Like, on our campus we have singing groups, we have dance groups, if you wanna do that, go ahead. Nobody is stopping you. Only person that's stopping you is yourself. And don't let anybody put you in a box where it's just like, okay, that's just another white boy. No. Like, you are a black man first, and, you're gonna do- you're gonna do great things. You just have to believe in yourself, you just have to power through.

Even though Spongebob preferred to associate with students with similar backgrounds, he recommended that African American males join any organization that interested them. The ties that they will make in these groups will help to sustain them throughout their college career, according to him and other participants.

Network of Friends

One participant, Christopher, emphasized the gratitude that he felt having close friends in college from similar backgrounds. Several students pointed out that one major reason why they chose to attend their college included the significant diversity of students on campus. After coming from backgrounds where there were few students of color in their classes, they were encouraged
to see students of color in significant numbers when they visited the research site’s campus. They felt that by having others with similar cultural backgrounds, they may share experiences which would facilitate becoming friends. He said,

But it was really good to just be in an environment where, uh, there are good vibes.
That you are with good people. And so that would also, uh, take your mind off certain things. It would uplift you to do what you have to do.

His friends helped to keep him motivated to succeed in school. This quote shows that Christopher could easily trust his friends. Since they understood something about what it was like to be a person of color, he felt that they could support him more effectively.

Christopher felt more comfortable with a diverse group of friends. Realizing that the odds were against them, they banded together.

If we were to see each other the next day it would be as if we never left. And so it's something really special that I'm really grateful for, and I feel like when you have that type of relationship, you take what they say more seriously, and you try to look out for each other. And so, with that being said, um, we try to push each other as much as we can.

Similarly, Juice Papi described that his mother frequently asked him, “What are your friends doing?” By asking this question, she hoped to learn what his interests were. Juice Papi said “the five people you surround yourself with is who you become” so he chose his friends carefully and followed his mother’s advice. This quote shows how cautious participants were when choosing friends. This was impacted by guidance from their families. They were taught that who you spend time with often impacts your behavior and values. Eli said, “if you hang around with, um,
partygoers and stupid kids, you're most likely gonna be a partygoer/stupid kid. Not all the time, but those qualities definitely rub off.” Both Eli and Juice Papi were cognizant of how hanging around with students with less commitment to their studies could cause failure. Therefore, they looked for friends who were serious about getting good grades like they were.

Another factor in choosing friends was participants’ gratitude that they had some friends who were also African American men. This eliminated the need to constantly explain how they felt about personal challenges. The level of trust that they had with these friends was higher. The effort that their university took to recruit a diverse student body resulted in the participants’ ability to find others who were like them culturally. Thus, they bonded to more readily.

Other benefits to having friends who were from similar backgrounds existed. One involved getting tutoring from other African American male students. They appreciated this because they felt that their friends were in a better position to support them academically. Since the professors and teaching assistants often shared similar ways of explaining the academic material, their friends could offer an alternative explanation. Sometimes, this explanation may offer a perspective that was easier to digest. James said,

‘Hey, you know, I don't understand this.’ But like your friend ...they understand what you're going through, so they understand how you think, and they can make it make sense to you in a different way.

In this quote, James explained why he felt that his friends were in a better position to answer his academic questions. They could relate better to his communication style and upbringing, and therefore had an advantage when explaining the work to him.
Participants described having friends with similar backgrounds important to them academically as well as emotionally. Their network supported them through difficult trials as a student. For Spongebob, he emphasized that he owed his success to friends. He said,

Oh yeah, so um, again, definitely my friends. When um, when I went definitely from my freshman year to my senior now, they are all- they always have my back. They always make sure, you know, are you okay? Are- are you eating? Are you doing everything that you're supposed to do? How is your classes going? Um, and again, definitely Unity House…- they motivated me. They are actually like inspirations to me and even when I go through my depression, I just always think like, ‘There's people here for you and if you need to talk to somebody, they're here for you.’

Spongebob had hoped to find more professors of color in his college, but he tapped into the other African American students that studied alongside him when in need. He felt comfortable disclosing his battle with depression, and this enabled his friends to understand the condition and support him in the specific ways that he needed help. Once again, the level of trust that he had with his friends made it easier for him to talk to them about this personal subject.

Family Support
The participants valued the support of their friends and the sacrifices that their families made to get them to college. Rex felt motivated to do well in school because he remembered how hard his parents worked. He said that he did not like asking them for monetary support for college. He especially wanted to graduate to make their efforts worth it. Rex called his parents almost daily and visited them often. He was very concerned for their well-being and turned to them for the emotional support that he needed as well. All nine of the participants talked about
how their relationship with their family members motivated them to do well. Either they were motivated because of a sense of duty not to let their family’s work be in vain, or they were motivated by their family’s important presence that supported them through academic challenges or both.

Participants had several reasons and ways in which their families supported them. Many of these reasons tied into their identity and how their families had experienced the world. Some of the participants were motivated to succeed in school through their family because they witnessed how they were ill-treated while growing up. TYRJ talked about instances where his mother was discriminated against and disrespected publicly. Others were impacted by their family’s financial standing in society. Their parents worked multiple jobs because they lacked skills to obtain higher paying jobs. Various families lived in unsafe neighborhoods, and some were just victims of racism. Not all belonged to the lower-class, but they could not escape the negative impacts of growing up African American.

The participants used their relationships with their families to help them cope with adversities that they encountered in college. Spongebob talked about how his grandparents, brother and mother cared for him during his college years. They aided him financially and inquired about his well-being. In addition, they helped him to stay focused on his goals for the future. He said,

Yes so I always had some food. Um, and definitely my mom and again, my older brother. They just always want to make sure that I'm good, they want to make sure that I'm taking (care of) every step of the way of my college life. And making sure that, because now I'm here, okay now what are you trying to do after? What job are you going after? What do you really wanna do? So, um, definitely was my family was very supportive.
This interest in Spongebob from his family boosted his morale and helped him make the most of his college experience. Many of the participants spoke of going home regularly and calling frequently too to take advantage of this type of familial support. Rex added that he called his family almost every day. He disclosed, “Uh, my support system would basically be my family. I'm very close with my family. Um, that's pretty much what drives me to stay focused in school.” The participants benefited from having family members who constantly gave them encouragement and freely communicated with them. Several participants like Rex, Spongebob, and TYRJ elaborated on how support from home was pivotal in their academic success.

Christopher recommended using several things, including focus on family, to support students in college. He articulated,

I definitely want to emphasize that, overall, the thing that's definitely kept me going is having a balance. I feel like, uh, doing too much of one thing isn't really good. Um. As cliché as that sounds, it's-it's very true. I believe that it's important for myself and that others have a time to be with their family-

Christopher believed that support from home enhance his chances for success in college. However, he felt that other activities and factors led to his positive academic experience. Nonetheless, most of the participants acknowledged a strong, positive influence from their families on their academic outcome in their predominantly white university.

**Summary**

These nine participants showed in their interviews similar thinking and common approaches to achieving success in college. They spoke of how their past struggles, academic preparation, and family culture influenced how they thought about studying, asking for academic help, and interacting with others on campus. The predominantly white university setting influenced
their strategies to achieve academic success. Their identities drove many decisions which the researcher thought would be driven by other factors such as availability of tutoring. For example, awareness and utilization of resources for academic help, and reasons for being motivated to succeed were linked to their backgrounds and how they fit into their university setting. Their life experience growing up as African American males shaped their approach to their academics, what kept them going in college, and who and what they relied upon for help.

From this research, the environment of studying in a predominantly white institution as opposed to a historically black college or university affected the attitudes and strategies of participants significantly. The themes and subthemes showed that their motivation and methods for achieving academic success depended upon their reaction to studying in a mostly white university. For example, several participants chose to be as independent and self-reliant as possible because they did not want to reinforce negative stereotypes of African American men that they faced. The participants did not identify as readily with their white professors, administrators and tutors. They did not share a similar background. This affected how they viewed the efficacy of resources available to them for academic support. Would professors, graduate assistants, and tutors be able to explain the material in a way that would be easy to understand given their different perspective and communication style? The participants did not think so in several instances.

Due to this gap in commonalities, participants looked elsewhere for academic and social support. There were relatively few African American professors, mentors and tutors available for support compared to the desired number. But participants spoke highly of those that were present at the research site and spoke of how caring and helpful they were to the students. Despite some supportive mentors, the sub themes showed that dependence on participants themselves, their peers, their family members, and their religion were all important. These aids were personal and showed
a reliance on their own racial communities. Having to face what could be an unwelcoming, unfamiliar environment caused these participants to look within themselves and look to loyal support mechanisms that worked previously.

Several participants spoke of on campus clubs and jobs. They joined activities surrounding sports, dance, politics, identity, and career specialties, to name a few. In these clubs, they were able to expand their social circles. Some spoke of how this made it easier to connect with students who had the same major, and then they could arrange study groups. Being able to turn to others who encouraged them to do their best in college, while demonstrating successful techniques helped the participants gain valuable insight.

The participants clarified in their interviews how the made meaning of studying in a predominantly white university. Who they turned to for help was shaped by who they were as people, their experience facing oppressive stereotypes, and pressure to be successful for the good of themselves, family members and communities. The research shows that the meaning that participants made depended deeply on their experience as people who had faced discrimination in the past. They were determined to use these negative incidents of their past to make the most of the opportunity to graduate from their university. A priority was to graduate to be able to get high-paying jobs from the STEM majors that they studied. This would increase their financial standing and the worth of their families that worked hard to fund their educations. The drive for success was strong because they wanted to succeed academically not just for themselves, but for their families.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications for Practice

The purpose of this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was to understand the meaning that participants make of academic success. The phenomenon of academic success and retention was generally defined as remaining enrolled at a four-year college at least from year three up until graduation. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used for this qualitative approach because it gave the researcher an opportunity to interview the nine African American male students, record their responses, analyze commonalities, and interpret their sense-making of
this phenomenon. This study focused on the input of a group of college students and their shared reaction to a phenomenon. By using IPA, the researcher was able to gain access to people who had lived through the common experience of being African American male students who were academically successful in a predominantly white university.

The research question was: What were lived experiences of African American males that showed how they were motivated to stay in school? This chapter will be organized into the two superordinate themes and their six subthemes. The first superordinate theme is values and belief systems. In this section, this research reviewed attitude of persistence, self-reliance and self-determination as African American males and the subtheme of religion and pressure from family. The next superordinate theme is strategies for academic success. The subordinate themes included pre-college academic preparation, on-campus involvement, network of friends, and family connections.

After briefly restating an overview of each finding, the researcher will explore if the findings are confirmed or contradicted in the literature of other scholars. Once it is determined how the finding fits within current literature, conclusions will be described. Recommendations will be delved into at the end of the chapter concerning each of the six findings. This chapter will conclude with areas for future research.

Values and Attitudes

Finding 1: Attitude of persistence, self-reliance and self-determination as African American males

The values and attitudes that the participants developed growing up as African American males in the United States greatly influenced how they thought about achieving academic success
in their predominantly white university. The negative academic perceptions that others had of them and their abilities caused them to react to trials in certain ways. One finding was that the participants preferred to rely on themselves when they encountered academic or social challenges in college. This originated from a reluctance to feed into stereotypes that African American males always did poorly in class. They did not want to appear needy or dependent. In order to avoid fulfilling this expectation that society had for these young men, they learned to motivate themselves or rely on members from their own communities. They did not want to perpetuate the lie that African American male students could not succeed academically and were destined for failure. This prevented them from being keen to seek outside help from their professors and from tutors. It was not that they were unaware of the resources available, it was more that they were reluctant to tap into them because of what their actions would say about them.

The literature says that this form of self-reliance in the form of self-motivation played an important role in the academic success of students. Some research on African American male students found that they were not interested in pursuing academic excellence (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). These researchers argued that by studying hard and obtaining good grades, African American males were afraid of being ostracized and accused of trying to adopt the culture of white students, while rejecting their own culture. To be academically great was to aspire to be part of the majority’s culture while rejecting their own background (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Although this is a prominent argument, other researchers link student success in African American males with a wish to do the best that they can in college. Harris (2006), authored a study that had findings in line with this research. Unlike Ogbu’s, (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), thesis of African Americans not attempting to do well in school for fear of being ostracized, he found the opposite. African American students wanted to do well in college to support their goals
to improve their future and the future of their families. They were not focused on being accused of opposing their culture; but took pride in doing well in school. One study, (Horvat & Lewis, 2003), reinforced this notion with their research that showed that African American males were indeed interested in excelling academically and the lack of a desire to succeed was not a reason for the achievement gap between them and white students. Because of studies like these, this research supports self-motivation and self-reliance as found in this study.

The approach of self-reliance that these participants chose was part of the scholarship on retention (Tinto, 2012). Based upon this, the conclusion that the researcher draws is that this finding is in sync with more recent scholarship on the importance of self-reliance and self-motivation (Harper, 2015; Harper, Wood, & Amechi, 2015). This study underlines the importance that self-reliance plays in the academic success for African American males (Martin, Harrison, Stone, & Lawrence, 2010). Studies also show that African American male students have the drive to succeed in school that is based on their high personal goals and strong values. Also, this self-reliance and self-motivation comes from the will to defy low expectations of them that are rooted in negative social stereotypes. The participants of this study showed how it was their conscious decision to display independence in the face of an environment like a predominantly white university which they may have found repressive. This study demonstrated that these choices to self-motivate were not simply bravado. Instead, it was a strategy used to achieve their academic goals as independently as possible while maintaining self-esteem. The next finding to be discussed is religion and family and how they impacted the participants’ academic success.

**Finding 2: Religion and Family**
The stress of being a victim of racism, lacking an extensive support network at school, and having fewer financial resources caused participants to turn to relationships with God and respond positively to pressure from their families. They spoke of how they were able to focus on their goals and realize that things were going to turn out fine because of their faith. They relied on the confidence they had in the hard work and ingenuity of their family members, too. They worried less and prayed more. Overall, they adopted a belief that somehow things would work out, even if some relative had to work an extra job, or if they had to take a year off from school to save money (Donahoo & Caffey, 2010). Participants in their interviews were less apt to describe panic when faced with dire circumstances like failing courses, poor health, unpaid tuition bills, or a disconnect in communication with some of their professors. Their relationships with God and their families reassured them that just like in the past, things were going to work out, and they were going to survive and do fine, one way or another. The literature (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006; McGuire, 2017) supports the notion that African American students, unlike many of their white college student counterparts, continue to rely on religion and spirituality to deal with the stresses of college. Despite the overall decline of participation in organized religion for millennials, African Americans continue to make religion a part of their lives in college. Studies have shown (McCray, Grant, & Beachum, 2010; Walker & Dixon, 2002) that this reliance on religion and spirituality has resulted in higher academic success, (measured in terms of indicators like higher grade point averages, and lower rates of academic suspensions), for African American college students. This was true of the majority of participants of this study. Therefore, the researcher concludes that the finding that religion played a positive and significant role in the academic success of the participants is in line with the current literature.
In addition to the influence of religion in their lives, their families expected them to do their best and succeed in college. Several participants spoke of the pressure that they felt to study majors that would lead to high-paying jobs. As a result, all the participants majored in STEM fields and most had plans to become engineers. Their goals were to work in careers that could raise the standard of living of their families. They wanted to develop skills that would make them marketable for the long-term. The literature says that this presence of faith in God and guidance from their family is common for African American young men, although not as much so for their white counterparts at this age (McGuire, 2017). Some researchers found that many African American male and female college students turn to religion for support while attending predominantly white institutions. However, they found that the male students often expressed higher levels of anxiety overall compared to the female African American college students, despite their beliefs (Cokley et al., 2013). This researcher postulated that this anxiety may have resulted from the amount of racism that African American male students faced, even when compared to female students of the same race. One conclusion that the researcher draws from this finding is that these African American male students took advantage of their belief systems to sustain themselves throughout college. This reflects other current research. Whether it resulted in a solution to the problems they faced, such as stress from racism, depended upon the study. Some found prayer and spirituality to be efficacious in this population compared to other students.

With regard to family or kinship network support systems, the literature confirmed this finding that participants valued the support from their relatives. They helped them to be goal-oriented when it came to their academic and professional futures. Their relatives gave them encouragement and supported them financially, too. Having their family members have positive expectations for the participants helped them to stay focus and to not consider dropping out of
college a viable option (Barnett, 2004). From the literature, it is clear that having a family support system was very important to African American college students. Their goals are shared by their nuclear families in their desire to get an education to secure a higher socio-economic position. Participants in this study acknowledged that their parents’ expectations of them included attending college, and parents gave advice and support on applying to college. Some participants said that their parent was the one who chose which college they would ultimately attend. One study, (Cheng, Ickes, & Verhofstadt, 2012), showed that family support in college correlated positively to students’ grade point averages. Even if their parents were unable to support them sufficiently financially, their social support alone encouraged their children to perform well academically. Other studies found that support from parents helped students’ self-efficacy and that resulted in motivation in college and better academic outcomes (DeBerard et al., 2004; Klink, Byars-Winston, & Bakken, 2008). The finding from this study confirms what the literature presents about the importance of family in their motivation to attend and graduate from college. African American male college students take advantage of the support of their families who are vested in their desire to graduate from college. The next finding to be examined will be pre-college academic preparation and how the participants used this as a resource to excel in college.

**Strategies for Academic Success**

**Finding 3: Pre-college Academic Preparation**

One type of strategy that enabled the participants to find academic success when they went to college was attending advanced academic classes and being employees in paid work in college preparatory programs. These included taking honors and advanced placement classes, summer school classes at the university that they were going to attend that fall, attending afterschool enrichment
programs, and working in a hospital in an honors science program (Graham et al., 2013). Various types of programs were available, and the participants were eager to take advantage of these learning opportunities. They learned about the content of the college level classes, familiarized themselves with their college campus and professors, made friends in advance, and learned how to live independently. Some participants even spoke about how advantageous learning how to shop and manage money the summer before college was once college began.

These findings are situated in the current literature as supported one aspect of college preparedness for African American male students. Several researchers have examined factors and remedies that impact youth who are at risk for dropping out of a predominantly white institution (Batts, 2014; Cadet, 2008; Gray-Nicolas, 2017). The threats include poverty, lack of healthcare, high incarceration rates, violence, and a culture of low academic expectations towards African American males. To counter these, participants felt that preparedness for college, academically and socially made a difference, and sought classes and programs that would help them to address this need. Many studies have been done on college readiness and its importance, especially in the fields of literacy and numeracy (Gray-Nicolas, 2017). Several researchers found that pre-college academic preparation to be important, but other types of readiness to be important as well. Other areas considered included the impact of study skills, time management, and self-management (Strayhorn, 2014).

The conclusions that the researcher may draw concerning pre-college academic preparation are that they are important for the future success of students. They are necessary for academic as well as social enrichment. The next finding to be discussed is the impact on the participants’ success because of their on-campus involvement.
Finding 4: On-campus involvement

Participants found it helpful to involve themselves in different types of on-campus activities. They enjoyed things such as sports, career clubs, academic clubs, leadership opportunities, political posts, and cultural clubs. In these activities they found ways to connect with others that shared common characteristics, met people to study with, and expanded their social network in general. Through these clubs, they found purpose, joy, and connection to their campuses. From this, their motivation to remain in their college grew. The likelihood of their academic success and increased chances for graduation fits within the literature. Several authors have written about this connection between enhanced chances for academic accomplishment and involvement with on-campus organizations. The literature supports this finding that students who engage in on-campus activities have greater chances for academic success in college. Some studies have linked self-efficacy and interest in college to student engagement in on-campus activities (Kahu, Nelson, & Picton, 2017). Because theorists like (Tinto, 2012) have supported these claims, the researcher concludes that the findings are in line with the literature. Each of the participants spoke of how on-campus involvement, with students who were African American or not, helped them to integrate with their college, organize their time, and become a more successful student. Although the participants had a propensity to spend time with and receive support from people with a similar ethnic background, when it came to on-campus activities, they were open to making friends from different backgrounds. This was the opportunity for them to expand their group. If they met someone in an on-campus club, they felt more comfortable talking to that person in another setting, such as eating with them in the cafeteria, or even studying with them. On-campus activities for the participants
helped equalize how they viewed the other students and integrated within the fabric of the university (Kuh, 2009).

Participants felt it was necessary to be involved in interests to develop themselves as individuals and well-rounded students, also. They spoke of taking the initiative to try new things and not being stereotyped into certain pursuits the many African American males typically engage in. They were involved in different types of clubs and associations that helped them to get information, make connections with others, and add structure and meaning to their days. One author, (Givens, 2016), underscored that the motivation for African Americans at predominantly white universities to become engaged on-campus differs from their white peers. They benefit from on-campus involvement, but often get involved because they feel excluded from the mainstream university culture because of their race. Sometimes they join clubs for minority students to have a safe place to escape from the microaggressions that they may face on a daily basis. This study corroborates the current literature concerning the value and purpose of on-campus involvement. The next finding of the research to review is having the support of a network of friends.

**Finding 5: Network of Friends**

All of the participants spoke of the gratitude that they had for their circle of friends. These friends were there for them when they needed motivation to go to the library. They were there to listen to them when they were depressed. They helped problem-solve when there were financial issues. Their friends understood where they were coming from because many shared similar socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds.
Participants did speak of wonderful mentors that they relied on who were professors and administrators at their university. However, they felt that there could have been more African Americans in those roles, so, as a result, they turned to fellow students. Many spoke of choosing their university because of the strong presence of African American students at their university. It was clear to them when they visited as high school juniors and seniors that the university population was diverse, and this was important to them. As time went on, they used these friends to pave the way for them. These were the friends who gave them good advice and who provided motivation to them when their priorities were not in order. Their network of friends were special because they had similar characteristics. They came from households where their families sent them to college through great sacrifice. Perhaps others in the family had not had the opportunity to attend college. In several instances, the participants were setting the example for younger brothers and sisters that would follow in their higher educational footsteps. Having likeminded friends meant that they understood what was at stake.

The literature speaks of the significance of (Cadet, 2008; Harper et al., 2015; McClure, 2006; Tinto, 2017) networks of friends for African American male students as pivotal for their success. From this, one may conclude, that having solid networks of friends as shown as significant in this study, supports other studies. The literature consistently shows that students may benefit from having interfaces and communications with peers in clubs and groups on campus. In conclusion, African American male students who persisted at the research site felt, like in other studies, having connections to on campus groups was imperative.

**Finding 6: Family Connections**

Participants valued the involvement and support of their families in their lives while they were studying in their university. Several spoke about calling and visiting home regularly.
Relatives stayed connected by sending food and other expressions of love and validation through the mail. Participants stayed motivated to do well in school because of this support from their families. They felt grateful and knew that their families sacrificed plenty for them to attend college. They did not want to throw away the opportunity that they had been given to graduate from their university. All of the participants came from households where they were expected to achieve great things financially. In some cases, they were the first ones to go to college in their families. Also, some of the participants spoke of how the odds were against them for being successful in college. They noticed how few African American men graduated from college and how few graduated from the Engineering department. This made their goals seem even more improbable to achieve. By being the victims of racism growing up, it was clear to them that it may be more difficult to realize their goals. They were going to need the support of their families, and they were not shy to lean on them. The participants trusted their families and went to them for comfort, judgment, and insight (Anumba, 2015). When other students their age may have been interested in becoming more independent at college, these participants were more fascinated with the wisdom of their families. Years ago, the literature stated that having family support for African American male students and other students from racial minorities may be distracting and a deterrent (Tinto, 1975, 1988). Indeed, these participants arguably had more responsibilities than some of their peers with more resources, but they felt that overall having relatives encouraging them to do well in college was very valuable. Currently, the literature reflects that for non-traditional and minority students, the encouragement that families offer to students is beneficial (Sarcedo, 2014). Since this is consistent with finding number six, the researcher concludes that this study supports this aspect of the literature on African American male college students.
The researcher concludes that these relationships between the participants and their family members were pivotal to their academic success. They provided encouragement and the underpinning necessary for them to have less stress and more time to focus on their studies.

**Recommendations**

The researcher, from the prevalent themes of the participants’ interviews, saw some simple things that university administrators could put in place to support students who are at risk of drop out in college. For example, recommendations for administrative changes in universities that may help African American male university students who strive for self-reliance by including courses that focus on the study of the development of African American youth. Having a clearer sense of how the history of African American people intersects with the sense of self-reliance and masculinity may instill a sense of pride in the identity of these students. It may also diminish the feeling that they are alone in how they choose to manage their university experience as African American males. Their choice to be self-reliant has a historical and cultural rationale.

In the second finding, African American students found support within their religious communities and from their relatives. By having opportunities for various types of worship on campus, universities may elevate the status of religious diversity to the importance of gender and racial diversity. In this way the university may facilitate their interest in maintaining their spirituality. If this is not possible, information about local houses of worship and the times of their services would enable students to go locally to worship. Clubs on campus which aim to concentrate students based upon their faiths would give these African American male students the chance to identify others with similar spiritual goals.
For another finding, local colleges and universities may continue to expose African American male students to pre-collegiate programs. Having partnerships with local high schools that have low financial resources would help to develop pipelines of students who have the potential to succeed in higher education. Through these partnerships, students may be encouraged to take summer classes at the local colleges or participate in programs designed specifically to prepare high school students to successfully navigate the trials of college life. In addition to summer programs, high school students may be encouraged to take advanced placement and honor classes that are not available in their schools online, at local community colleges, or at afterschool enrichment programs. According to (Tinto, 2012) teachers in the K-12 classrooms would also be logical ones to facilitate introducing African American males to academic programs at schools and in the community. They may be the best advocates that students may have in identifying resources which would increase their chances of have a successful academic experience while in college.

Some other recommendations based on this study would be to encourage participation in on-campus activities, regardless of the make-up of the group. From this study, it appears that if the participants had one major thing in common with the club members, they were able to become friends even if they were from different backgrounds. In the past, administrators may have focused on having clubs and activities which had students of color together in the same groups. They were then able to support one another in the transition to college. However, from this study, participants showed that although they enjoyed making friends with other African American young men and women, they also found it very helpful to confide in students from a variety of backgrounds. Participants felt it was necessary to be involved in interests to develop themselves as individuals and well-rounded students, also. They spoke of taking the initiative to try new things and not being stereotyped into certain pursuits the many African American typically engage in. Since being
independent was so important to this group of participants, I would recommend that administrators focus on encouraging incoming African American male students in particular to try non-traditional sports, clubs, and activities. One participant spoke of the joy he had from the dance club he belongs to. These types of associations with on-campus organizations keeps students who face many challenges interested in their academics. These students had distinctive life experiences and approached academic challenges in a separate way. Yes, having friends and study partners with a similar background is preferable, however, the participants also benefited from having a diverse network.

Another recommendation for on-campus activities and African American male students may be to have more work opportunities on campus that help meet the needs of financially needier students. Currently, work study jobs help to supplement the needs of students who need some income while studying. However, the participants spoke of the need for positions on campus that could help more significantly with their monetary responsibilities. For example, having a job as a resident assistant was a coveted position because it meant free room and board. This was one of the few ways that they could address the financial commitments while still having enough time to do their academic assignments. Several of the participants were resident assistants and they spoke of how necessary this job was for their success on campus. They could focus more on their assignments once they had the assurance that their expenses were covered for the year. Other work opportunities with this level of benefit are necessary for students who come from backgrounds where paying the bills to go to school are a hardship and a distraction from their academics.

Participants spoke of the attraction of attending a university with a significant number of African American students. However, the dynamic of having more African American students than professors and administrators is common in many predominantly white universities across
the United States. It will take time to diversify faculty in these universities. Since there are Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the United States whose mission underscores educating African Americans, it is not clear whether or not there is a priority to significantly diversify faculty in the near future in most predominantly white universities. The researcher concludes that until this is a clear priority, steps can be taken to pair African American male students together in mentor/mentee relationships with successful older students, or faculty and administrators. Another recommendation can be having African American cultural living arrangements on campus. Offering an orientation organized by ethnicity prior to the start of the school year helps reduce anxiety that incoming freshmen may feel about being one of few minorities on campus. Incoming participants spoke of how happy they were to see people they had met in the summer preparatory program in their dorm on move in day.

Other recommendations include making it easier to develop a network of friends to support students in their university experience. Many participants depicted their experience in high school as being isolating and marginalizing because they were the only African American or one of a handful of African American students. From this experience, having a network of friends with young men who were like them culturally mattered considerably. Introducing freshmen to Black fraternities, professional/ethnic clubs like the Society of Black Engineers, National Association of Black MBAs, and the National Association of Black Accountants would educate them early on regarding some groups of interest.

One finding dealt with the importance of family involvement to the student’s success. Administrators should make it easier for African American students to connect with their parents while at the university. Administrators may keep parents connected on social media and through email about what is happening on campus like the schedule of special events, exams, sports, trips,
etc. Having parents’ weekends throughout the year when students can invite their parents to college would give them some insight on their children’s’ day-to-day lives. By having the student affairs office reach out to parents with emails letting them know of academic and social supports that are available for students, they may be empowered to encourage their children who may benefit from them.

One of the core areas that impact academic success for the participants was the professors and the experiences in their classes. The participants spoke of varying interactions with some of their professors. Although there were professors that they found to be supportive, there were others that the participants described as making them feel less a part of the class compared to the white students. For example, Spongebob spoke of being in one class where he would raise his hand, but he would never get called on. Instead, the professor would call on the student directly behind him. Incidents like these made several of the participants feel like they were not valued, even invisible, and as a result, they were not as motivated to seek help or ask questions of some of their professors outside of the classroom. Because of these interactions, professors should be trained through professional development to learn to be more aware and sensitive to the needs of all students in their classes (Tinto, 2012). Colleges’ retention will increase when they implement programs to grow awareness of proper ways to teach in diverse classrooms.

Areas for Future Research

The theoretical framework for this qualitative study was Luthar’s academic resilience. The researcher hoped to identify strategies that participants used to find academic success and retain in their predominantly white university despite obstacles. The focus of the study was not the deficit model of African American males dropping out of college. Instead, the researcher highlighted how they used their backgrounds to adjust and find motivation to keep them going in college. The
participants demonstrated academic resilience because they faced unique challenges as African American male students. Yet, they overcame these problems and stayed focused on graduating from college. In this study the participants chose to rely on themselves and increase their independence.

Despite the large number of studies on retention that focus on high drop-out rates of African American males, few participants spoke of academic deficiencies in freshman year as a major obstacle. Many of them participated in pre-college academic programs or had taken several advanced placement courses. They were quite prepared to handle the work in college. Some told me that freshman year was similar to high school in difficulty. Clearly, the perception that African American males are not succeeding because they cannot do the work did not surface in this study. These students were prepared for the academic challenges that college offered. The strategy of being as prepared as possible by taking advantage of every advanced class in high school and summer school program in college was worthwhile. More research needs to focus on why these students are succeeding instead of cataloging reasons why they fail.

Future research may explore the various approaches that successful university students used to prepare for college and how these strategies could be promoted to students of diverse backgrounds. For example, in this study, participants spoke of afterschool academic programs, summer programs at colleges, advanced college courses taken in their high schools, and work opportunities as some things that helped them transition to college. These programs supported their retention. Future studies could investigate the systems that would need to be in place so that all students may have the ability to be aware of and tap into college preparatory resources. Tinto (2012), wrote about the need to do institutional assessments to keep abreast of the changing academic and social needs of African American male students. By staying in touch with their
challenges through surveys and interviews, administrators will know how to invest effectively to impact college retention. Needs of students change over time.

With colleges and universities becoming more diverse, the concept of self-reliance warrants further examination. African American males are not alone in feeling marginalized in the US. Students of other ethnicities, nationalities, religions, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic backgrounds may find it difficult to accept help from mainstream sources in universities for similar reasons identified in this study. How can services such as tutoring be offered in such a way that some students do not feel alienated in receiving the needed help? The university provided the tutoring in this case, the participants were aware of it and its benefits, but the stigma associated with using it was too great for them. Their identity and stereotypes about African American male students lessened the likelihood that they would seek outside tutors. What environment and factors would have made them feel more comfortable approaching the tutors?

The importance of family came up twice-pressure from family motivated participants to stay in college and support from family that kept them going in school. Since the research site was a public university, the participants were all from local towns, so they could take advantage of the tuition discount for in-state students. As a result, they were close to their families physically. It was easier to visit home often and have the support that they needed. For future research, perhaps studying family involvement and academic success based upon students attending universities further away from home, would indicate the impact of family support from far away. Other research sites could include state and private schools in other states. How much does distance away from home and family network play in the success rate of minority university students? With new technologies such as videoconferencing, text messaging, and email, how much does distance detrimentally hinder the supportive family relationship while students are away?
Studies concerning academic success of different minority groups such as African American males exist, but for future research the settings of the study may change to keep up with changes in higher education. For example, how do virtual and hybrid university programs, which have become more commonplace, influence the experience of successful minority students? How does studying online influence approaches that these students take for academic success? Since they are not visible to teachers and classmates, do students feel that it is easier to seek help without feeling like they are feeding into a negative stereotype? Many researchers have written studies with Historically Black Colleges and Universities and predominantly white universities as their research sites concerning African Americans. However, for retention, more exploration could be done in the setting of online universities.

Conclusion

The research question is: What were the lived experiences of African American males that showed how they were motivated to stay in school? The findings of this study supported a number of theories in the current literature on ways to achieve academic success in college for African American male students. From these findings, conclusions about the participants in the study were posited. Based on the interviews, areas to support African American male students seeking academic success in predominantly white universities were discussed. Several recommendations and areas for further research were covered. Ways that these nine participants utilized to find academic success in college illuminated themes and strategies concerning retention in this group.
Despite facing difficulties throughout college, they persevered using the methods and attitudes that enabled them to focus on their goal to graduate.

The six findings showed that several approaches were taken by the participants to retain in college. Based on current literature, their attitudes and the strategies utilized confirmed the results of several other studies. Their resilience in academics was a result of a variety of processes applied to respond to challenges effectively. Some of their responses described were based on their values and belief systems. Characteristics of persistence, self-reliance and self-determination as African American males helped participants reach their goals. Their religious beliefs and pressure from family also played a positive role. Participants applied several strategies for academic success including pre-college academic preparation, on-campus involvement, a network of friends, and family connections. The findings of this study illustrated that for these nine participants, academic success was achieved through a variety of methods that enabled them to overcome obstacles at college that they faced as African American male students and graduate.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

*Topic:* Retention Behavior at a Predominantly White College-How do African American Males Make Sense of It?: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Date of interview:

Time of interview:

Interviewer: Denise Haile
Interviewee pseudonym:

Ask permission to begin recording. *(Begin Recording)*

**Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today to assist me with the research that will help enable me in my goal to graduate from Northeastern University’s Doctor of Education program. This research project focuses on African American young men and how they have successfully remained in college. I hope for you to describe how you feel you have been successful in retaining in college. The goals of the research were to learn directly from African American male students how you have stayed in college and how you have felt about your experiences. This research may be used to provide more effective resources for college students at risk of dropping out. It will also add to the research about African American young men that focuses on the positive things that they were doing to succeed instead of the literature that emphasizes failure.

The fact that you were a participant and what you describe during your interview will remain anonymous. Your participation is voluntary in this study. If at any point you change your mind about participating, you were free to stop being a part of the study. Everyone that participates needs to review a consent form before we can begin. Let’s go over it and I will answer any questions that you may have.

[Review and sign NEU Consent Forms]
Thank you. A few more things I need to go over before we start. In order to make it easier for me to analyze what you said exactly, I would like to ask your permission to audiotape the interview. Since it is important to record what you said in your own words, I would then like to have a professional transcriptionist type up the interview. I will email a copy to you for you to correct anything that you may disagree with. The transcriptionist will not be given your name, only a pseudonym. Is this process ok? Do you have any questions? Finally, I will forward you a copy of my overall findings soliciting your comments or corrections. How does that work for you?

I have planned for this interview to last no longer than 45-60 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. Please feel free to expand your answers to describe your experiences. I may ask follow-up questions to the main questions so that I get a clear understanding of what you mean. Do you have any questions before we start?

Great! Let’s begin.

Prompts to be used during interview

· Can you describe your ideas/feelings more?

· Can you tell me about something that illustrates your point?

· Why do you think that is?

I am now going to ask you questions focused on the topic of the study, which is how you make sense of your retention in college.
Questions for interview:

Background questions:

1. Tell me about your experience in higher education
   a. What year were you in currently?
   b. How many years have you been in college in total?
   c. Have you transferred from another college?

2. Can you tell me about your experience attending college?
   a. Where were you from? Describe your High School.
   b. Why did you choose to come here and attend this college?
      c. Why have you found it a good fit for you?
      d. Have you had a break in your education in college for personal/academic/medical or financial reasons?

Study Introduction Questions:

In order for everyone to understand the terms of the next few questions clearly and in the same way, I would like to define a couple of things here. For example, retention is seen as when students were able to stay in college at least until they were a junior and hopefully go on to graduate.
3. Can you explain how you adjusted to university life freshman through current years?
4. What factors motivated you to stay in college up until now?

Another key definition for this study is how we define educational resilience. I will read this summary to you and all other participants:

**Definition of Theory of Educational Resilience:**

Educational resilience happens when students do well in school despite challenges like poverty, racism, lack of social support. In order to be resilient, students need to have protective factors that enable them to respond positively to the risks that they were facing. In order to be educationally resilient, students have to have been exposed to some type of adversity or threat, but positively adapted nevertheless (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000)

5. Tell me a story of how you were able to overcome difficulty to stay in school?
6. What enabled you to have positive outcomes despite difficult situations (resilience)?
7. Can you describe factors, such as mentors, tutors, and family support, that have helped you to do well in classes and stay in school?
8. What did family, friends, faculty and administrators do to help you be successful and overcome difficulties during college?
9. Describe other things at school made it easier to persist and why?
10. Describe a situation that illustrates how you got through a difficult time.

**Conclusion Questions**

11. What other factors or people do you believe helped you that we did not talk about concerning your experience persisting?
a. If you were to speak to an African American male student starting off at your college or a similar college, what advice would you give him to help him retain in college and become an upperclassman?

b. What advice would you give teachers and administrators of things they may do or need to stop doing that would help increase the retention success of more African American male students in college?

Thank you for your cooperation and participation in this interview. Just a reminder, your responses was tied to a pseudonym and therefore your identity was confidential.

If I come across a need to ask any follow-up questions, which would most likely only be the case if I felt clarification were needed in regard to one of your responses, would it be all right for me to contact you? Would you prefer I contact you via email or telephone?

Sometime over the next month, I will email you word-for-word transcripts. If you choose, you can review the information, and you will have one week to provide me with any feedback, alterations, or corrections. Can you please confirm the email address you would like for me to email the transcripts to?

Finally, when this thesis study is complete, which will most likely be 3-6 months from now, would you like to receive an electronic copy of the document?

Do you have any questions for me?
As a token of my appreciation, please accept this gift card to Starbucks.

Thank you so much for your participation in this study!

[Hand over gift card]

Appendix B

Informed Consent:

My name is Denise Haile and I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern’s College of Professional Studies. The principal researcher is Dr. Kimberly Nolan. This study focuses on retention, or the lack of dropping out, of college by certain students. The population that we were targeting is African American men who were in their undergraduate institution.

We were choosing students who have identified as being an African American male who attend a specific predominantly white university in Massachusetts. We have selected you, also, because you have been successful in persisting or not dropping out up until now in your undergraduate studies. We was working with upperclassmen.

There is little risk associated in this study. Your name was changed to a pseudonym. There was no compensation for participation. This study will not impact you negatively in a financial, educational, or social way. You may drop out until the data analysis stage without any repercussions. This study will not affect your relationship with your university or your grades in any way.

In order to participate in this study, you will need to sign this informed consent and agree to sign up. I will give you a copy of this informed consent that was signed by you and me. This
form will have my institution’s name and my contact information. After this, we will have one interviews either face-to-face or on Skype. These interviews was recorded so that they can be transcribed and analyzed. The interviews will last approximately 60 minutes and there was one of them. You was asked questions that pertain to how you successfully persisted in college.

Denise Haile signature  Participant signature

Date  Date

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