

“THE AMAZING RACE” – SUCCESS THROUGH PERSISTENCE AND RESILIENCE: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN
AMERICAN MALES AT A PRIVATE HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE AND
UNIVERSITY

A Dissertation

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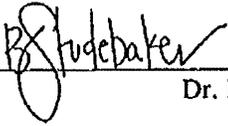
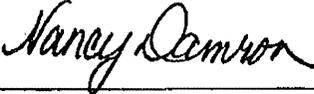
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AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT
DISSERTATION

This dissertation of Luwis Mhlanga, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education with a major in Educational Leadership and titled "THE AMAZING RACE" - SUCCESS THROUGH PERSISTENCE AND RESILIENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AT A PRIVATE HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY. has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates given below, is now granted to submit final copies.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated in memory of my loving father and mother, Amon and Belinah Mhlanga who did not live long enough to see this accomplishment. Thank you for instilling in me the importance of education and not to give up in life. Your legacy of hard work continues. Also in memory of Louie Evans (the late) American grandparents and Lucy-Nell Evans for giving me unconditional love and encouraging me to dream big. I thank you. To my beautiful and wonderful family, Mackayla, Zoey, Wadzanai and my amazing, supportive lovely wife Fadzi. I love you beyond words. To my brothers and sisters for being there when I needed that push in life. I thank you.

ABSTRACT

Nationwide, a steep decline in the number of African American males enrolling and graduating from colleges and universities exists. To address the determination of African American male students, a closer inspection of factors promoting their persistence to degree completion is needed. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of eight African American male students at a private Historically Black College and University (HBCU). This investigation explored the factors that may have contributed to their persistence and resilience to stay on-course towards their degree completion. Tinto's theory of academic and social integration was used to frame this study and attempt to answer the following three research questions: (a) How do African American male students overcome challenges they encounter in college? (b) To what do African American male students attribute their academic success? and (c) To what extent did the educational experience at this private HBCU influence one's decision(s) to persistently enroll until graduation without dropping out? Purposeful sampling was utilized in the selection of the eight African American male students who were on the verge of successfully completing their degrees. Multiple, in-depth interviewing was the primary method of data collection. Narrative data was collected from all participants, fully transcribed, and verified for accuracy. After completion of the interviews, the raw data was read several times to identify emergent themes. The data analysis revealed three emergent themes: (a) influential people; (b) in the face of adversity, I stay strong; and (c) college enriching experiences. Key findings from the study suggest that academic and social integration contributed to the persistence and resiliency of eight African American male students. The connections were viewed through the lens of Tinto's Student Integration Model.

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Chapter I

Introduction

What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun, or fester like a sore, and then run? Does it stink like rotten meat, or crust and sugar over like syrup sweet? Maybe it just sags like a heavy load. Or does it explode?

-Langston Hughes, 1995

There are many positive outcomes associated with attaining a post-secondary degree. Employment opportunities and salaries are increasingly determined by the level of one's education and a college diploma functions as an engine of social mobility (Cahalan, 2013; Snellman, Silva, Frederick & Putnam, 2015; Goldrick-Rab, S, Kelchen, R, Harris, D.N & Benson, 2016; Schanzenbach, Boddy, Mumford & Nantz, 2016). However, a large percentage of African American male students, who enroll in institutions of higher education end up not successfully completing a degree (Farmer & Hope, 2015; Flowers III, 2015; Harper, 2009; Roscoe, 2015; Washington, 2013). Melzer and Grant (2016) associates the dropout phenomenon with students who are underprepared in math, reading comprehension, and/or writing skills. Underprepared students face challenges such as not achieving on-time graduation requirements and encountering financial difficulties in sustaining their educational endeavors (Farmer & Hope, 2015; Hughes, Gibbons, & Mynatt, 2013; Knaggs, Sondergeld, & Schardt, 2015; Melzer & Grant, 2016). Unfortunately, national trends indicate African Americans from lower socioeconomic status encounter these barriers (Farmer & Hope, 2015; Gasman, Nguyen & Commodore, 2015; Knaggs et.al, 2015). Inasmuch, many students who attend less-selective

historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are low-income, first-generation and Pell-Grant eligible (Cantey, Bland, Mark & Joy-Davis, 2013; Farmer & Hope, 2015; Mercer & Stedman, 2008; Patterson, Dunston & Daniels, 2013). Additionally, first generation minority students from lower socioeconomic statuses are likely characterized as underprepared compared to other groups (Farmer & Hope, 2013; National Center for Education Statistics, 2016; Patterson et al., 2013; Roscoe, 2015).

In 2014-15, 29 percent of four-year colleges and universities had open admissions policies, of which 28 percent accepted more than three-quarters of their applicants. An additional 30 percent accepted from one-half to less, and 13 percent accepted less than one-half of their applicants (NCES, 2016). Open admission policies allow institutions to accept all applicants regardless of previous academic record or grades (NCES, 2016). Approximately 26 percent of HBCUs have open admissions policies (Flores & Park, 2013; Patterson, Richards & Awokoya, 2012). Open admission allows a high school graduate to enter college regardless of his or her qualification for admittance into the program, and it is a policy that provides hidden talent to be uncovered (Clark, 1960; NCES, 2016).

Within the United States there are 105 institutions classified as HBCUs and most are small, with relatively high percentages of disadvantage students. These institutions are also characterized by having less academic selectivity (Shorette II & Palmer, 2015; Richards & Awokoya, 2012; Wilson, 2007; Melguizo, 2008). The graduation rate at most selective institutions (HBCUs and non-HBCUs) is about 75 percent compared with 39 percent with open-access admission (Melguizo, 2008; Patterson et al., 2013). The academic achievement gap is striking between selective and non-selective institutions. Low-income students as a group perform poorly in standardized test scores, high school completion rates, college enrollment and

completion rates (Farmer & Hope, 2015; Harper, 2009; Reardon, 2013; Stephens, Brannon, Markus, & Nelson, 2015; Patterson et al., 2013; Roscoe, 2015; Washington, 2013). On the other hand, high-income students make up a big share of the enrollment at most selective colleges and universities (Reardon, 2013; Reardon, Baker, & Klasik, 2012, Stephens, et.al., 2015) Moreover, low-income students are more likely to be raised by a single parent with a low level of education (Reardon, 2013, Stephens, et.al., 2015). Table 1 illustrates degree comparison completion rates by first generation and non-first generation students in postsecondary education.

Table 1

Bachelor's degree completion rates by first-generation and low-income status: cohort class of 2003

| Bachelor's degree completion rates by first-generation and low-income status | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|--|----------------|-------------|
| | Attained bachelor's degree | Attained associate's degree or other credentials | Still enrolled | Dropped out |
| Low-income, first-generation | 10.9 | 26.1 | 16.1 | 46.8 |
| Low-income, not first-generation | 24.1 | 18.8 | 16.5 | 40.6 |
| First-generation, not low-income | 24.9 | 21.8 | 15.5 | 37.9 |
| Not low income and not first-generation | 54 | 9.3 | 13.4 | 23.3 |

Low-income is defined as the student's family income falling at or below \$25,000. First-generation is defined as students who come from families where neither parent has earned a bachelor's degree or higher.

Source: The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education

Degree completion as well as low enrollment of African American male students in colleges and universities throughout the country is still prevalent (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Palmer, Davis & Maramba, 2011; Shorette & Palmer, 2015). Numerous studies have indicated a dismal tenacity, graduation, and academic attainment of African American males in higher

education (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Roscoe, 2015). Most of their struggles start to emerge prior to college in the grades between Pre-Kindergarten and twelfth grades (Flowers III, 2015; Hines, Borders & Gonzalez, 2015; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011; Palmer et al., 2011, Roscoe, 2015). Furthermore, the low enrollment of African American men is a by-product result of an absence of a family college tradition (Roscoe, 2015). This cluster of African American male students experience the lowliest scholastic outcomes than any other groups in education at-large (Roscoe, 2015). In terms of graduation rates in high schools, African American male students stand at 47%, compared to Hispanic males at 57% and White males at 75% (Kafele, 2012). The achieving completion gap between race and ethnicities prompted the U.S. Department of Education and the Obama administration to have federal programs such as *Race to the Top* and the *School Improvement Grant* competition. The funding of these programs is intended for the states and local school districts and designed to improve student achievements (Blankenberger, Lichtenberger, & Franklin, 2016; Hines, Moore III, Mayes, Harris, Vega, Robinson, Gray, & Jackson, 2017; Childs, & Russell, 2017).

African American males within the venue of American's higher education system also continues to be disproportionately underrepresented. The latest statistics released lists that only 33% of African American males earn bachelor's degrees compared to 60% Whites and 48% Hispanics within six years (Kafele, 2012; Simmons, 2013; Strayhorn, 2014). Despite this reality, the small number of African American males who persist to earn a bachelors' degree will provide a more informative approach on how to further assist individuals in the pipeline of completing a postsecondary education.

Statement of the Problem

Completion of a post-secondary degree is vital to future success for African American males in the United States. An educational attainment provides an avenue for career advancement, financial gain, and extended opportunities for racial equality with a realization of the “American Dream” (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2016; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Snellman, Silva, Frederick & Putnam, 2015). The attainment of a college degree plays a pivotal role in shaping access to valued life opportunities of upward mobility (Cahalan, 2013; Snellman et al., 2015; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2016; Stephens, et al., 2015). A post-secondary degree increases lifetime earnings, and an individual with the degree can expect to earn 84% more than those with a high school diploma (Stephens, et al., 2015). In 2008 then-Senator Barack Obama, after winning the presidential election stated, “This is our time-to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; to reclaim the American Dream,” (CNN Transcript, 2008). The Constitution of the United States of America guaranteed all Americans “life, liberty and pursuit of happiness (U.S. Const.) This is the heart of the American dream (Su, 2015; Combs, 2015). Per Truslow (1947) on the American dream, “It is a dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement” (pg. 308). As the first African American president, Obama proved and enhanced the American dream for many African American males. Ani (2013) states that hope does not exist without specific goals on which to place one’s hopefulness. Hope consists of intentions and behaviors (Ani, 2013). Hence, the classic challenge and dilemma facing institutions of higher learning at-large are the lack of representation of African American male students in higher education (Cuyjet, 2006; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Ingram, 2016; Palmer et al., 2009; Strayhorn & DeVita, 2009). Much of academic failures associated with African American male students is the

lack of achievement in the classroom whereby the overwhelming majority are in special education or incarcerated (Flowers III, 2015; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Roscoe, 2015; Scott, Taylor & Palmer, 2013). With these negative statements in the literature, Kozol (2005) asserts lack of compassion and interest of African American males in education-at-large is an injustice, and society should be willing to pay more attention to the plight of this group. Hope is there, and an achievement in degree completion of African American males will provide greater leverage related to their quality of life and making a great contribution to society (Palmer et al., 2009).

The challenges and strengths endured by African American male students' persistence, and resilience to graduation will be seen through the lens of a metaphor. Landau, Robinson, and Meir (2013) define metaphor as a figure of speech through which a word or phrase is used to describe one thing in terms of another. The theme of "*Amazing Race*" has been used to influence part of this study. The *Amazing Race* television show pairs contestant members to search for clues around the world (Mathews, 2009). The dynamics of the show puts the contestants under a variety of stressful physical, mental, and emotional challenges. In the race, there are mandatory pit stops and if a group arrives last it may be eliminated from the race (Mathews, 2009). The metaphor of *Amazing Race* therefore, describes and identifies how students survive the rigor of academic life in sometimes intimidating college environments. It is stated, "Life always begins with one step outside of your comfort zone" (anonymous).

The transition to college for many African American males can be a nerve-racking experience. In the same breath, *Amazing Race* is a new experience and an adventure for the contestants vying for the big payout: money. The feature of *Amazing Race* is the continuous surveillance of individuals engaging in a variety of actions hence attempts to teach viewers about people and places (Mathews, 2009). Therefore, to succeed in the race, one should adapt and learn

quickly the norms of a culture where the leg is being filmed. For each leg, the contestants are traveling around the world in a new, foreign environment completing different tasks. These individual tasks are regarded as normal/routine activities for the native people. It is contestants' ability to perform under duress without emotional melt-downs and to weather stress during the race. The stressful/frustration level is manifested through the competitive nature of trying to stay ahead of the competition and fear of being eliminated from the game. Each leg of the race is therefore unpredictable. As for African American male students, the whole academic journey is volatile (Farmer & Hope, 2015; Roscoe, 2015). In *Amazing Race*, one uses both mental and physical stamina to stay ahead of the competition. The formidable challenges encountered during *Amazing Race* is like the educational experiences faced by many African American male students (Flowers III, 2015). The intention of the study was to give an inclusive view of the experiences associated with the struggles linked to the academic life of African American male students. These individuals were either skillfully negotiating or fighting against internal and external forces that could derail getting them in achieving their ultimate goal; a college degree.

Background

Far too many African American men that enter the doors of higher education are leaving without completing their degrees (Cuyjet, 2006; Gasman et al., 2015; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Hines et al., 2015; Palmer et al., 2009; Strayhorn & DeVita, 2009). Historically, African American communities have highly valued the impact of education on their children (Brooks, 2015; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016; Palmer et al., 2009). African American communities understand that knowledge is power and education represents a form of freedom (Franklin, 2002; Klugh, 2005; Palmer et al., 2009). Education is a vehicle for positive change. It is both beneficiary to the individuals as well as the community. W.E.B. Dubois eloquently stated the

role of higher education in his book, *The Education of Black People* (2001), as one of the essentials to the production of character, vital not only to the individual but to the larger African American community. For any African American male child when asked about their aspirations when they grow up, most responses will be associated with success in life. They want to be a doctor, teacher, scientist, pilot, and now even to be the president of United States of America. The prerequisites of achieving the life-long goals, is firstly by obtaining a post-secondary degree (Hines et al., 2015; Schanzenbach et al., 2016). However, recent statistics disclose a different picture regarding the persistence of African American male students in post-secondary institutions. Figure1 illustrates a snapshot of the current bachelors' degree completion rate of male students by race at 4-year public institutions.

Figure 1

Four and Six Year Degree Attainment by Gender/Race

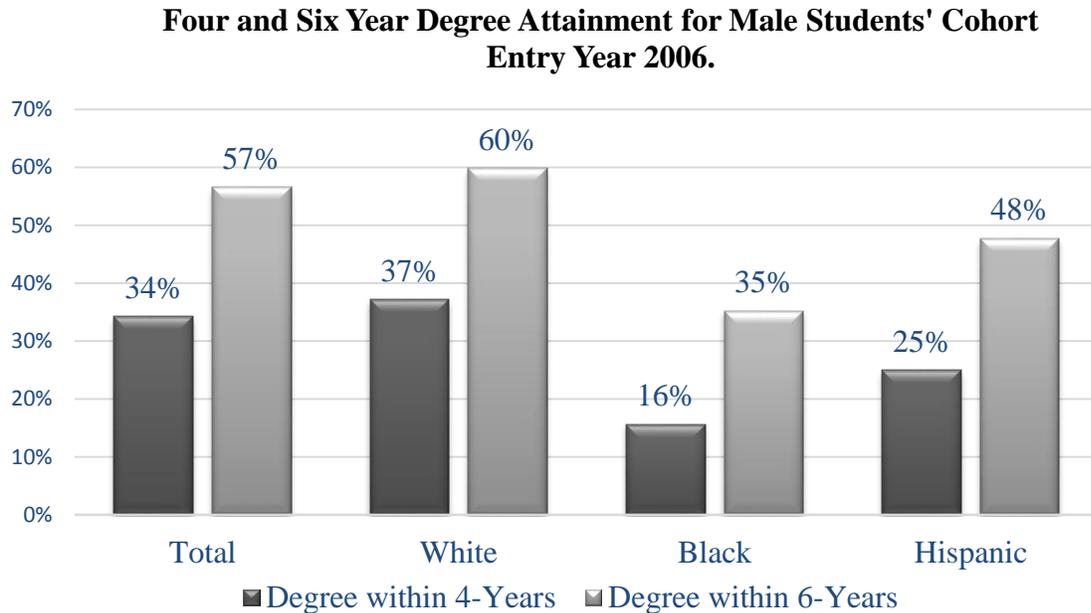


Figure 1. Percentage of degree attainment for first-time, full-time bachelor's degree seeking students at 4-year public university of college within 4 and 6 years – Cohort entry 2006. Note: The degrees are offered at institutions that participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs.

Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_326.10.asp

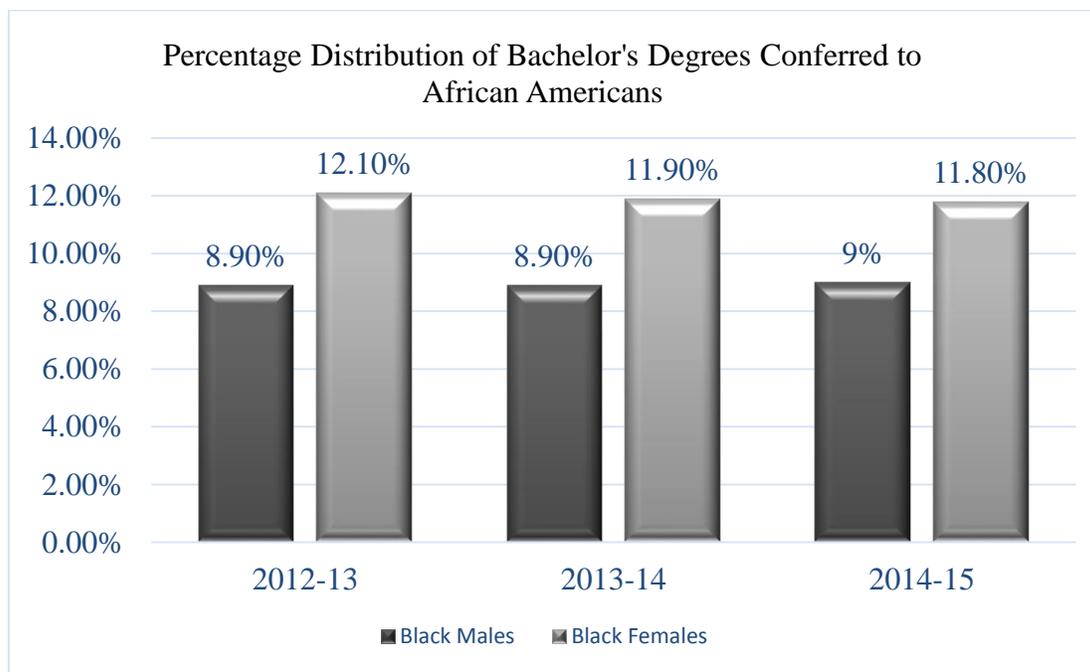
Source: U.S. Department of Education: National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2014

Historically, African American male students have attained undergraduate degrees at substantially lower rate than that of their White and Hispanics counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The trend started in the early 1990s when graduation rate dropped significantly in African American males, mostly from lower-to-moderate socioeconomically class attending White institutions (PWI) or Black colleges (Warde, 2008). A statement published from the Department of Education (2011) indicated two-thirds of African American males who registered in post-secondary education unenrolled prior to receiving a college degree. Most of this population are underprepared and lack the necessary skills needed to be successful

in postsecondary level. According to Roscoe (2015) the number of African Americans who take remedial coursework at college level stands at 41%. Therefore, under preparedness increases the likelihood chance of dropout from college (Farmer & Hope, 2015; Flowers III, 2015; Hines et al., 2015; Roscoe, 2015). This is the bottommost college accomplishment proportion of all races and sexes. The gender gap in degree attainment is also pronounced between the two genders (African American males and females).

The data in Figure 2 shows an inequity exists between the percentages of bachelor's degrees conferred to the African American male population, when compared to African American female students. Although this disparity exists across all races, the biggest gap exists among African American population. Past literature has often labeled African American male students with phrases such as unqualified, less intelligent, underprivileged, remedial, in crisis, extinct, susceptible to fail and left behind (Howard, 2013; Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Figure 2 highlights the comparison gap between African American male and female students.

Figure 2

Percentage Distribution of Degrees Conferred to African American Students

Percentage distribution of degrees conferred to U.S. citizens.

Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_322.20.asp?current=yes

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Statistics

Most studies that focus on African American male learning abilities and attainment place a heavy emphasis on shortfalls that promotes a doom and gloom trajectory for the group. (Gasman et al., 2015; Harper, 2009; Howard, 2013; Land, Mixon, Butcher & Harris, 2014; Scott et al., 2013). These studies fail to reveal and spotlight the few African American male students who are doing well and going on to be productive citizens of society (Williams & Bryan, 2013).

The persistence and the drive from African American men in obtaining a degree is at its lowest level since early 1990s (Palmer, & Young, 2010). The decline in numbers can be traced to: (a) a weakened group of young Black men ages between 18-35 in confinement and victims of homicide, (b) the influence and dominance of a negative street culture from their peers that

fosters anti-schooling (Davis & Muhlhouse, 2000; Noguera, 2003) and (c) lack therefore of academic readiness which is associated with schools that do not have rigorous college preparatory curricula in place (Carey, 2016; Knaggs et.al 2015; Royster, Gross & Hochbein, 2015). In addition, young African American men routinely internalize negative stereotypes about themselves and as a result, perform at the level of their internalized stereotype rather than to their true abilities. Carson's (1996) broad statement stated, "success is determined not by whether or not you face obstacles, but by your reaction to them. And if you look at these obstacles as a containing fence, they become your excuse for failure. If you look at them as a hurdle, each one strengthens you for the next." (p. 35). Historically, it is well documented that HBCUs serve a unique and pivotal role in promoting access to college for the African American population (Burrell, Fleming, Fredericks & Moore, 2015; Cantey et al.,2013; Freeman & Cohen, 2001; Nichols, 2004; Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to give an inclusive view of the experiences associated with the struggles linked to the academic life of African American male post-secondary students. A qualitative phenomenological study was used to investigate the lived experiences of eight African American male students regarding their persistence and resiliency at a private HBCU. Therefore, the intent of this study was to construct and explore several worthy research questions (Creswell, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Three research questions were posed:

1. How do African American male students overcome challenges they encounter in college?
2. To what do African American male students attribute their academic success?

3. To what extent did the educational experience at this private HBCU influence one's decision(s) to persistently enroll until graduation without dropping out?

Description of Terms

The following are definitions and description of terms used throughout the study. According to Spivak (1997) the caveat behind definitions is that, they are shifting and unstable as well as inaccurate however necessary. On the other hand, describing and assigning meaning to terms adds clarity in the research study (Creswell, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam, 2001). For the purpose of this investigation, the following terms were operationally defined as indicated below.

Academic integration: (structural) integration entails meeting the explicit standards of college or university, and (normative) integration pertains to an individual's identification with the normative structure of the academic system (Tinto, 1987).

African American male: This term will be used interchangeably with Black men and refers to be a male of African descent born in the United States of America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)

First-generation students: Is defined as students whose parents graduated from high school or less and had no post-secondary experience (Ishitani, 2016).

Grade Point Average (GPA): A measurement of one's academic achievement on a scale of 0.00 – 4.00.

Graduation rate: Is defined as all enrolled students who earn a degree within six years at the same institution. (U.S. Department of Education)

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU): Colleges or universities that were established before 1964 with the principle and mission of educating African Americans

who were excluded from higher education opportunities at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), (Wenglinsky, 1996)

Low-income: Low-income is defined as the student's family income falling at or below \$25,000 (The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education).

On-time graduation: A six-year graduation rates for first-time, full-time students who began seeking a bachelor's degree in fall 2008 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Persistence: The ability of a student to remain enrolled in an institution until the completion of a degree (Tinto, 1988).

Primarily White Institutions: Is defined as an institution consisting more than 50% of Caucasian students. (Chen, et al., 2014).

Remedial courses: Is defined as courses for students lacking the skills necessary to perform at college-level work (U.S. Department of Education)

Social integration: The students' participation in the social systems of the institution. It is measured by the number and quality of peer relations, participating in extracurricular activities and student clubs, participation in student government, and satisfaction with social life (Tinto, 1987).

Underrepresentation: In this study, it refers to students of color i.e. African American males who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education.

Significance of the Study

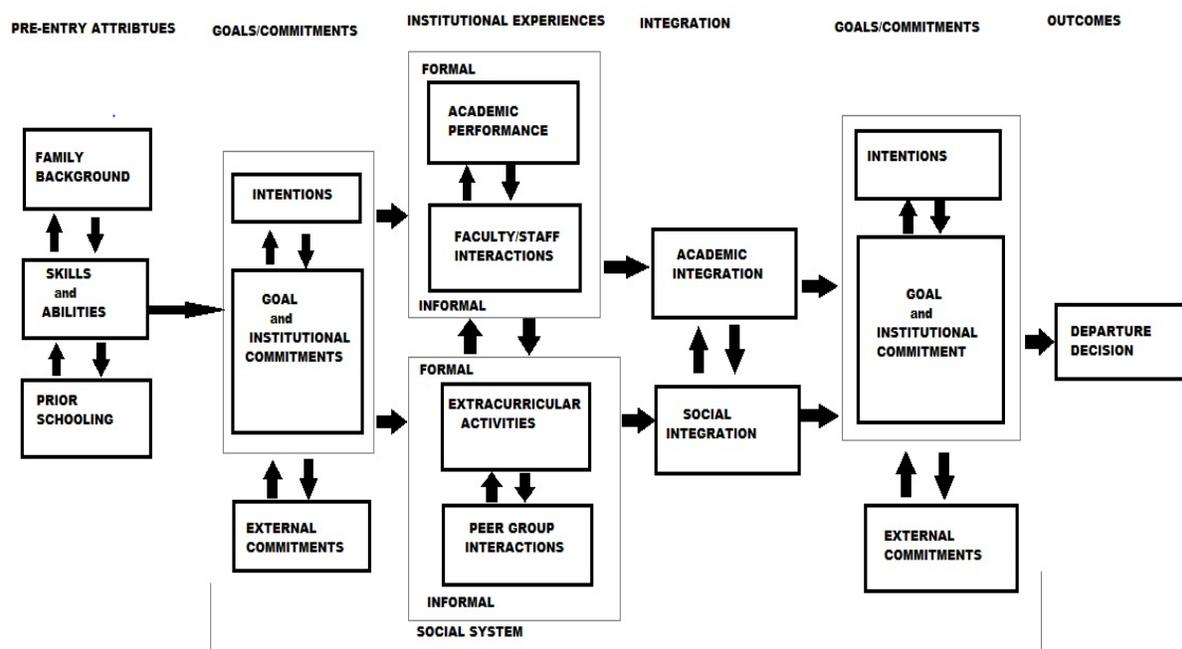
President Roosevelt said, "No country, however rich, can afford the waste of its human resources. Demoralization caused by vast unemployment is our greatest extravagance. Morally, it is the greatest menace to our social order." This quote embodies the significance of this study.

Nationwide, a steep decline in the number of African American males enrolling and graduating from colleges and universities exists (Cuyjet, 2006; Palmer et al., 2009; Scott et al., 2013; Strayhorn & DeVita, 2009; Warde, 2008). To address the determination of African American male students, a closer inspection of factors promoting their persistence to degree completion is needed. In African American male students' voices, stories of tribulations, hope, and victories were told. Because there are negative stories about African American male students in literature there is a profound need to understand and address success stories of this population (Scott et al., 2013; Shorette II & Palmer, 2015). The objective of this research study was to understand the lived experiences of African American male students using a qualitative phenomenological approach. One of the fundamental aspects of a qualitative study is to generate understanding and not pass judgment (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The results of the study can be tailored towards a better understanding of future African American male students' collegial experience. This research will add more depth, richness and value to the limited studies done on African American male students, specifically those attending HBCUs. This investigation addresses an existing gap in the literature by focusing on the relationship between the challenges and strengths garnered by African American men in HBCUs. Previous research emphasized African American males in PWIs (Palmer et al., 2009). It is worthwhile to learn and understand the factors that enable African American male students to experience personal and intellectual success. The success stories can become blueprints that can be adopted by other HBCU institutions in retaining and graduating African American men. This is a higher education issue, a national security issue, a socioeconomic issue, a family issue, and an African American issue that needs to be taken very seriously (Kozol, 2005).

Theoretical Framework

Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model of academic and social integration in higher education is the most widely investigated and frequently cited model in student retention (Cabrera, Nora, Castaneda, 1993; Mannan, 2007; Milem & Berger, 1997, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). The central idea in Tinto's model is of integration. In Figure 3, the theoretical framework illustrates student's decision to persists or dropout, which is strongly predicted by the degree of academic integration and social integration. Integration is highly influenced by individual and institutional characteristics. From individual perspectives, these can range from socioeconomic circumstances, family support, clarity on the purpose for higher education, and pre-college characteristics. The institutions of higher education too, has different characteristics that may match or mismatch students' commitment to degree completion.

Figure 3.

Tinto's Student Integration Model.

Model of Student Integration by V. Tinto (1993). Permission Granted. Reference Number: 00495310601

Tinto's model of student integration was built upon academic and social factors that have been found to foster or impede persistence decisions by students (Cabrera, Nora, Castaneda, 1993; Mannan, 2007; Milem & Berger, 1997; Tinto, 1987). The more a student integrates academically and socially, the more likely that student is to persist (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980).

According to Mannan (2007), Tinto's model theorizes that students enter post-secondary institutions with a variation of attributes, personal backgrounds, educational experiences and achievements, skills and value orientations. Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) theorized that student departure is a direct outcome of a student's lack of integration into the academic and social communities of the college or university. Therefore, if students are poorly

integrated into the academic and social fabric of the institution, they are more likely to withdraw from college (Swail, Reed, & Perna, 2003, Tinto, 1988). Tinto's model considers formal and informal social and academic experiences in determining a student's level of integration (Swail et al., 2003). The premise from many literature studies states that an institution plays a role in the retention of its students by either facilitating or impeding their academic and social integration (Cabrera, Nora, Castaneda, 1993; Mannan, 2007; Milem & Berger, 1997, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model comprised of four major domains:

1. Pre-entry attributes,
2. Academic integration,
3. Social integration, and
4. Dropout decision.

The pre-entry attributes directly influence college experience (Tinto, 1987). Specifically, Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) theorized that students committed to their institutions and reasonably satisfied with the learning environment maintain consistent goals for degree completion and are more likely to persist and graduate from their respective institutions. In Tinto's view the likelihood of a student's dropping out from college is closely related to the characteristics of the family background (Tinto, 1975). Furthermore, family socioeconomic status is inversely related to dropout. On the other hand, students' own ability to grasp and understand college level work is undoubtedly related to persistence. For instance, gender of the individual is related to college persistence with a higher proportion of women finishing degrees than African American men. Therefore, the academic and social integration model recognizes

the importance of student integration and indicates that social activities and academic activities are important to the student (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993).

Students leave post-secondary education for a variety of reasons. Degree attainment is at its lowest for students of color and low-income students when compared to the White and Asian counterpart (Hines et al., 2015; Perry, Martinez, Morris, Link & Leukefeld, 2016; Roscoe, 2015). Therefore, a failure to intellectually integrate within the college or university culture further diminishes the chance of persistence. In addition, academic integration has strong dominant influence especially during the first and second year of a student's academic life (Mannan, 2007, Tinto, 1988). A person's academic integration is measured in terms of grades (GPA), performance and intellectual development with faculty and staff interaction (Tinto, 1975). In academia, a good grade point average tends to be more reflective of an individual student's reward of a truly academic integration. Thus, GPA performance becomes more of a reflection of the student's ability and institution's preferences for positive academic behavior (Tinto, 1975).

Social integration refers to how good students are fitting into college social environments. The process of social assimilation mainly occurs through informal peer group association, partly-official secondary activities and collaboration with faculty and staff within the college (Tinto, 1975). For instance, for social integration to be regarded as successful, varying degrees of interaction needs to occur. It is achieved through shared communication established by the friendship and faculty support. These are viewed as important social rewards for the individual's educational and institutional commitment (Tinto, 1975). In this respect, it was found that individual insights of social integration are mostly linked with persistence.

However, absence of any supportive groups is, in turn, associated with voluntary withdrawal (Tinto, 1988).

Dropout decision approaches a multilayered process encompassing the interaction between the individual and the college\university organization characteristics (Tinto, 1975). For example, the characteristics of the whole campus infrastructure, the resources, facilities, and composition of its faculty can place confines upon the improvement of academic and social integration of its students (Tinto, 1975). The evidence points that if a student is well integrated into the college\university community, then that individual student will feel in congruence with the institution. On the other hand, dropout decisions according to Tinto's model are viewed as a result of two key failures: lack of integration into social life and/or insufficient compatibility with the academic rigor (Gentry, 2014).

Likewise, in 1993 five areas that influence persistence were identified by Tinto. These were (a) student goals, (b) commitments, (c) institutional experiences, (d) integration and (e) academic preparedness (Porchea, Allen, Robbins, & Phelps, 2010). The theory suggests that academic preparation is not the sole factor of college success however, it is one of the strongest predictor of student persistence (Porchea et al., 2010). In his assertion, a need for high expectations from faculty must be the cornerstone that provides a clear and consistent message that compels students to study (Tinto, 2006). According to Tinto (2006), knowledge and passion for a particular subject breeds integration. Without support, the essential condition for learning disappears (Tinto, 2006). During the time students' transition into higher education, they often need help and support from faculty and staff to prosper in their academic life (Tinto, 2006). Therefore, involvement plays a central part to integration into the academic and social spheres, and in return leads to persistence.

Overview of Research Methods

A phenomenological qualitative research design was used to examine the challenges and strengths of African American male students at a private HBCU and their persistence and resilience to graduation. Creswell (2015) defines qualitative research as ‘an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of material’ (p. 48). He asserts that qualitative research is preferred for assessing how different pieces come together to constitute a whole. Through the use of purposeful sampling eight African American males were recruited to take part in a series of semi-structured individual interviews which provided rich information on their lived experiences. The interviews were transcribed and coded to identify common themes. A pilot study was conducted with four African American males at a predominantly White institution (PWI) who had similar characteristics as the study’s participants. The sole purpose of conducting a pilot was to assist the researcher in addressing poorly worded questions or look over other instrument issues prior to the actual study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

Chapter II

The Literature Review

If we're honest with ourselves, we know that too few of our brothers have the opportunities that you've had here at Morehouse. In troubled neighborhoods all across this country- many of them African American...there are places where jobs are still too scarce and wages are still too low; where schools are underfunded and violence is pervasive; where too many of our men spend their youth not behind a desk in a classroom, but hanging out on the streets or brooding behind a jail cell.

President Barack H. Obama commencement address at Morehouse College, Atlanta, GA, May 19, 2013

Introduction

Across the spectrum of higher learning institutions, a steep decline in the number of African American males matriculating and subsequently graduating with degrees exists (Cuyjet, 2006; Farmer & Hope, 2015; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Strayhorn & DeVita, 2009; Hines et al., 2015; Palmer et al., 2009; Roscoe, 2015). For instance, each academic year since the late 1990s, the number of African American males who enrolled in college immediately after high school has decreased (Roscoe, 2015). As for African Americans matriculating to postsecondary education, the number stands at 57 percent unlike the Caucasian students at 72 percent (Farmer & Hope, 2015; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Land et al., 2014). President Obama addressed this concern during in his 2013 commencement address at Morehouse College stating, "If we're honest with ourselves, we know that too few of our brothers have the opportunities that you've had here at Morehouse. In troubled neighborhoods, all across this country- many of them African American...there are places where jobs are still too scarce and wages are still too low; where

schools are underfunded and violence is pervasive; where too many of our men spend their youth not behind a desk in a classroom, but hanging out on the streets or brooding behind a jail cell.”

There is a controversy between Black researchers on the underlying causes of why few African Americans go beyond high school and what solution(s) to offer for the issues being faced in the Black community (Flowers III, 2015; Hines et al., 2015; Ruffins, 2013). However, the drop in the numbers can be traced to, (a) a weakened pool of Black males between 18-35 due to high confinement rates as-well-as high statistics of homicides, (b) the manifestation of the “thug” street culture which enables anti-schooling sentiments (Davis & Muhlhouse, 2000; Land et al., 2014; Noguera, 2003) and (c) a deficiency in academic preparation, low teacher expectations, and disproportionate placement in special education (Flowers III, 2015; Hines et al., 2015). Ruffins (2013) stated African American males knows the value of education in addition to its positive benefits, however, upholding a street image is more supreme than doing assignments, studying for exams and maintaining good behavior.

Despite the bleak picture, there are progressive young African American males able to overcome these challenges and successfully graduate with their baccalaureate degree in historically Black colleges and universities (Farmer & Hope, 2015; Hines et al, 2015). Comparatively, there exists minimal literature focused on the successful individual male students attending HBCUs with mainstream literature focusing on Black male students attending predominantly White institutions (Farmer & Hope, 2015; Cuyjet, 2006; Palmer et al., 2009). The intention of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of African American male students at a private historically Black college and university. This review of literature will examine five main bodies of literature relevant to this investigation: (1) Tinto theoretical framework, (2) historical context of HBCUs, (3) a brief look at high school education

preparation, (4) types of support, and (5) the prevalence of African American males in higher education,

Tinto's Student Integration Model - Theoretical Framework

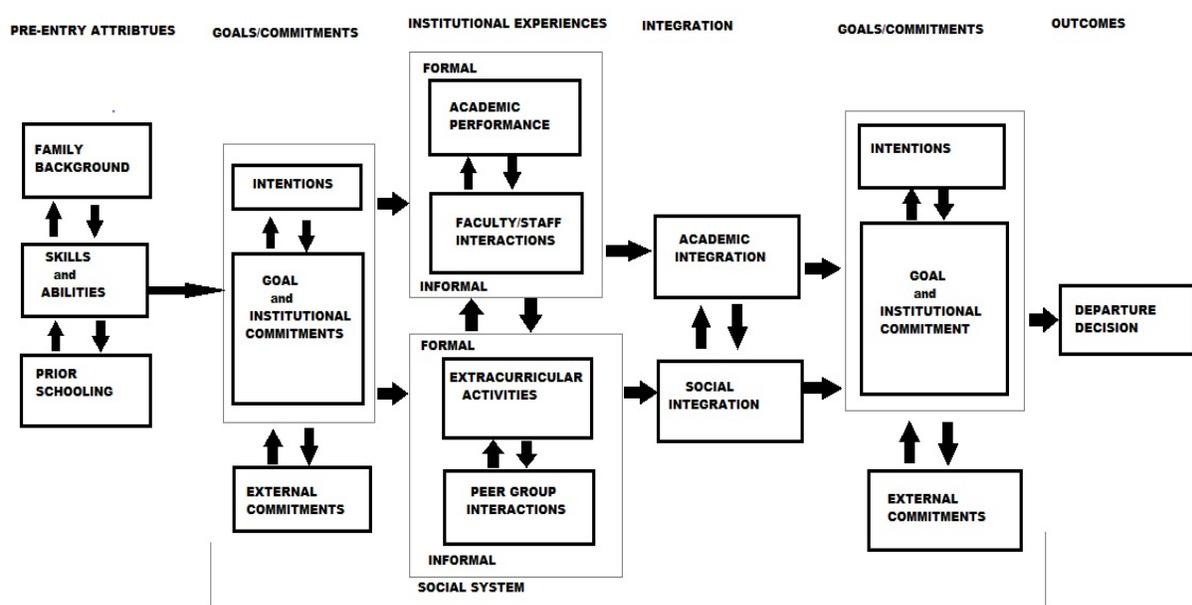
This research study is based on the theoretical framework of students' college persistence advanced by Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993). Research has shown persistence and integration are central to students' decision to stay in college (Tinto, 1988; Cabrera, Nora & Castaneda, 1993). Tinto's model postulates that students entering the doors of higher education come with diverse backgrounds. There are three initially categories delineated in the model: (a) family background, (b) individual attributes (e.g. unique personality factors), and (c) pre-college schooling (Jenkins-Guarnieri, Horne, Wallis, Rings, & Vaughan, 2015). It is these narrative factors that potentially lead an individual to integrate into a higher education institution (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2015). According to Tinto (1975), if students do not manage to integrate into a college or university community, they are likely to drop out. In order to persist, students need to be committed toward becoming educated (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2015). Thus, Tinto's theory fundamentally affirms the corresponding of student's motivation and academic ability within a college setting, which promotes two underlying commitments; assurance to an educational goal and a pledge to continue with the institution (Cabrera et al., 1993). In Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) findings, he suggested a student's probability of remaining in college is due, in part, to successfully negotiating through three stages:

1. Separation from their past communities
2. Transition from the high school environment to college life
3. Integrate into the academic and social subsystems of their campuses

Tinto's (1993) model acknowledges the impacts of numerous cultures and their influence on students' transitional commitments. Furthermore, Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) proposes that students must strive to complete the stages positively to effectively move into college life. Therefore, Tinto's student integration model (1975, 1987, 1993), is a longitudinal process of making decisions of either persistence or departure as it occurs at a specific institution with its own structure, values and rewards. Figure 3 illustrates the process and highlights students' decision making that leads to persistence and departure decisions.

Figure 3.

Tinto's Student Integration Model.



Model of Student Integration by V. Tinto (1993). Permission Granted. Reference Number: 00495310601

The student integration model was proposed by Tinto in 1975. It has evolved over a period of time. In 1987, Tinto modified the theory by adding student intentions into the model and defined the distinction between formal and informal communication with faculty. In 1993,

Tinto recognized that not all students attend four-year institutions but some attend two-year colleges. Tinto and account for commuter students in his original theory. Then, academic integration was recognized as more important than social integration among commuting and community college students (Davison & Wilson, 2014). According to Tinto (1975) integration is defined as a product of collaboration amongst students and their college environments. The student integration model's main purpose is to tie-in an individual's motivation and academic ability, together with institute's own academic and social features (Cabrera et al., 1993; Tinto, 1987). Therefore, a student arrives to a college or university with a range of personal, family and academic characteristics, and skills such as academic ability and family social status with specific goal commitments (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). These characteristics and goal commitments change over-time through a continuous interaction between an individual and members of the academic and social systems of the institution (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). For a student to persist in his/her educational endeavors, there is a need to be integrated into two interconnected systems, i.e. academic and social integration (Tinto, 1975). Tinto (2015) stressed that students do not seek to be retained but they seek to persist. Students begin college confident in their ability to succeed, however, some do not (Tinto, 2015). The challenge for institutions of higher education is in helping reshape students' belief in their ability to succeed (Tinto, 2015). According to Simmons (2013) early engagement into the academic and social settings by African American male students is significant to their persistence. In contrast, a sense of not belonging leads to withdrawal from contact with other members of the college community which further undermines persistence (Tinto, 2015).

Historical Context of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) continue to play an important role in the U.S. postsecondary landscape. They have a good reputation for admitting marginal students who would not otherwise qualify for more selective institutions (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Cantey et al., 2013; Palmer et al., 2009; Shorette II, & Palmer, 2015; Strayhorn, 2014). HBCUs are known for creating a warm, nurturing, family-like environment conducive for a reflection of racial pride, academic development and persistence (Albritton, 2012; Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Cantey et al., 2013; Palmer et al., 2009; Paterson et al., 2013; Shorette II & Palmer, 2015; Strayhorn, 2014). Therefore, HBCUs have a built-in goodwill reputation for a nurturing environment that creates a level of connectedness, a sense of belonging and students' intellectual ability is not automatically questioned (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011; Patterson et al., 2013). Additionally, HBCUs have liberal arts colleges' characteristic of having small class sizes and low student-teacher ratio (Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011).

There are 105 HBCUs operating in the United States and represents roughly 3% of American higher education (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Nichols, 2004). It is well noted that HBCUs serve students who are mainly first-generation college students and low income families. In fact, 90% of students that attend HBCUs receives some type of financial aid (Cantey et al., 2013; Patterson et al., 2013). Financial aid comes in the forms of work study, and student loans to cover tuition costs (Patterson et al., 2013). For many students, the financial difficulties can be overwhelming, resulting in students going to college part-time while working full-time (Cantey et al., 2013; Patterson et al., 2013). Through the framework of its mission and purpose, HBCUs have six goals. These are as follows:

1. Maintaining the African American's historical and cultural tradition;

2. Providing key leadership for the African American's community;
3. Providing African American role models for social, political, and economic purposes in the Black community;
4. Assuring economic function in the African American community;
5. Providing African Americans role models for social political and economic purposes in the Black community to address issues between minority and majority populations; and
6. Producing Black agents for research, institutional training, and information dissemination in the Black and other minority communities (Nichols, 2004).

It is these six goals that have propelled HBCUs to maintain a culture of excellence and sustain their relevance in the U.S. higher education system (Nichols, 2004). Furthermore, HBCUs are recognized for creating a significant number of African Americans graduates who become leaders in society (Cantey et al., 2013). HBCUs have established a rich legacy of producing prominent leaders. Table 2 shows a list of successful leaders and Black professionals who graduated from HBCUs. Along with their contribution to society, African American students in HBCUs exhibit positive psychosocial adjustments, cultural awareness, and increased confidence (Allen, 1992; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2004; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Shorette II, & Palmer, 2015; Strayhorn, 2014).

Table 2

A List of Successful Leaders who graduated from HBCUs

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| W.E.B. Du Bois | Journalist, and educator |
| Martin Luther King, Jr | A civil rights activist |
| Thurgood Marshall | A supreme court justice |
| Oprah Winfrey | An American media proprietor , producer |
| Toni Morrison | An award winning novelist |
| Langston Hughes | A poet |
| Samuel L. Jackson | Film actor, and producer |
| Spike Lee | Film actor, director, and producer |

HBCUs persist to play a vast leading role in advancing access of minorities in higher education (Cantey et al., 2013; Freeman & Cohen, 2001; Nichols, 2004; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Shorette II, & Palmer, 2015). These institutions were founded to educate college bound African Americans at a time when these groups were excluded from most institutions of higher learning (Albritton, 2012; Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Cantey et al., 2013; Gasman & Commodore, 2014; Wenglinisky, 1996). HBCUs became dynamic places to empower communities in socio-cultural and economic freedom (Freeman & Cohen, 2001; Strayhorn, 2014). As suggested by Henderson (2001) and Nichols (2004), without HBCUs, many African American students would have not gone to college. In the 1950s, 90% of Black students attended HBCUs. However today, the monopoly HBCUs used to enjoy as the lone educational provider for African American students has disappeared (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Cantey et al., 2013). The implications of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the Civil Rights Act (1964) opened doors for African

Americans to enroll in PWIs, hence a decline of the African American population at HBCUs (Cantey et al., 2013; Nichols, 2004). Statistics show that 48% of Black computer scientists, 75% Ph.Ds., 43% physical scientists, 48% Black teachers graduates from HBCUs (Cantey et al., 2013; Nichols, 2004, Patterson et al., 2013; Reid, 2011; Shorette II & Palmer, 2015). Similarly, Henderson (2001) indicated about 80% of officers in the military, and same percentage of federal judges, as well as 60% attorneys of all graduated from HBCUs. The facts mentioned above resulted in shaping an increasing and nurturing foundation of the Black middle class (Abelman, 2009; Cantey et al., 2013; Freeman & Cohen, 2001).

The financial assistance in establishing HBCUs came from widespread entities that included the Freedman's Bureau, Northern missionaries, Black churches, private philanthropists and governmental initiatives (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). The provision law of the 1860s paved the way for the land-grant colleges that created opportunities in education for newly freed African Americans (Abelman, 2009). A total of 19 land-grant institutions were organized however with status of non-degree-granting agricultural, mechanical and industrial schools (Abelman, 2009). The principal mission of HBCUs was and is still to educate African Americans (Abelman, 2009; Freeman & Cohen, 2001; Palmer et al., 2012). Currently, there are 105 HBCUs in 19 States and the District of Columbia. Table 3 shows the states where HBCUs institutions are concentrated and currently providing educational opportunities for mostly African American college bound students.

Table 3

HBCUs Institutions Listing by State

| | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| Alabama | Arkansas |
| California | Florida |
| Delaware | Kentucky |
| Georgia | Maryland |
| Louisiana | Mississippi |
| Missouri | Ohio |
| Pennsylvania | Oklahoma |
| South Carolina | Texas |
| Tennessee | West Virginia |
| Virginia | The District of Columbia/DC |

HBCUs do not only enroll African American students but educate students of all races (Patterson et al., 2013; Richards & Awokoya, 2012). In addition, HBCUs advocate for access, opportunity, and cultural empowerment especially to minority students (Nichols, 2004; Patterson et al., 2013).

With enrollment ranging from 200 to about 8,000 students, HBCUs provides personal individual attention to struggling students with a low student-faculty ratio (Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011). Despite their many accomplishments of educating people of color, criticism is being leveled against HBCUs from different spheres of society with regard of their relevance within higher education (Abelman, 2009; Cantey et al., 2013; Reid, 2011). Criticism raised focused on educational quality and value (Cantey et al., 2013; Kim & Conrad, 2006). Allen (1992) stated that historically Black campuses tend to differ in backgrounds and opportunities than their peers on White campuses. The differences are widely recognized through students' family socio-economic status, GPA, campus infrastructures and opportunities for advanced study (Allen, 1992; Cantey et al., 2013; Nichols, 2004; Reid, 2011). Therefore, HBCUs are accepting students from households with annual income of less than \$25,000, willingly accepting SAT or

ACT scores lower than traditional institutions and providing access to postsecondary education for first-generation college students (Richards & Awokoya, 2012; Reid, 2011). With these raw facts mentioned, HBCUs struggle with a student body that is underprepared, and at risk of dropping-out due to lack of financial resources (Abelman, 2009; Reid, 2011). Despite these statistics, 30% Bachelor of Arts degrees awarded annually originate from the 41 public and 48 private HBCUs (Kim & Conrad, 2006, Strayhorn, 2014; Reid, 2011).

The relevance of HBCUs should not be overlooked since they continue to educate a large percentage of African American students who currently come from low-income families and are first generation college students (Gasman & Commodore, 2014; Nichols, 2004; Richards & Awokoya, 2012; Strayhorn, 2014). In this sense, HBCUs serve as a bridge linking minority students of mostly low-income, and first-generation college student to the ivory tower of higher education institutions (Strayhorn, 2014). Therefore, opportunities are created for many African American students who might not have qualified to enroll at a predominantly White institution (PWIs). A professor of education at Columbia University Teachers College explained at the HBCU debate, “Are Black Colleges Still Needed?” that, “HBCUs are still critical because of the way they value their students and work to increase their students’ confidence” (Patterson et al., 2013, p. 156). Since inception, HBCUs have continuously provided access and opportunity to students regardless of academic preparation, socioeconomic status, and environmental circumstances (Patterson et al., 2013; Richards & Awokoya, 2012).

Educational Preparation from High School

In today’s society, a college degree has replaced a high school diploma as a primary measure of student success (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Perry, Martinez, Morris, Link, & Leukefeld, 2016). Furthermore, a postsecondary degree is considered as a

leading gateway for social mobility and economic progress in the United States (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Carey, 2016; Kuh et al., 2008; Perry et al., 2016; Royster et al., 2015; Sciarra, Seirup & Sposato, 2016). However, the educational pipeline for minorities, especially African American males in urban high schools, is depressing (Carey, 2016). Too few African American male students are graduating from high schools prepared for college (Royster et al., 2015).

African Americans are underrepresented in high school completion rates, college readiness benchmarks and Advanced Placement (AP) enrollment rates when compared to other races (Royster et al., 2015; Simmons, 2013; Vega, Moore III & Miranda, 2015). It is well documented that there is a significant gap of achievement between African American and White students in public education (Carey, 2016; Roscoe, 2015; Royster et al., 2015; Vega et al., 2015). For an example, the scores on the ACT in 2014 shows 49% of White students meeting three or more college readiness benchmarks as compared to 11% of African American students (Royster et al., 2015). The imbalance in educational outcomes of African Americans may arise from a lack of access to preschool or early childhood programs, quality teachers, access to high-quality curriculum, socioeconomic status and support systems (Perry et al., 2016; Vega et al., 2015). With this background, it is clear and definitive that many African American male students are failing to get their educational needs met (Bell, 2014; Roscoe, 2015; Vega et al., 2015). PreKindergarten-12 holds incredible potential power of sowing educational dreams of African American youths. The seeds where African American youth can imagine, express a desire to learn and prepare themselves for a better future along the lines of going to college (Carey, 2016; Rose, 2013). Schools possess two key functions: (1) encouraging and shaping the intellectual development of its students and (2) educating young people for the public good (Carey, 2016; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Rose, 2013).

Having a college degree plays a central role in shaping one's path to valued life opportunities that determines whether an individual will have access to upward mobility (Perry et al., 2016; Stephens et al., 2015). Educational systems are creating disparities in student outcomes in mostly urban school districts where a majority of minorities reside (Bell, 2014; Carey, 2016; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Howard 2008; Land et al., 2014). Thus, a college degree is instrumental in providing a better future for anyone who is willingly to complete a postsecondary education (Pike, Hansen & Childress, 2015). Therefore, the rationale for improving educational attainment according to Pike et al., (2015) is purely economic. Table 4 shows the earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment.

Table 4.

Educational level earnings and unemployment rates of 2015

| Education Attained | Unemployment Rate in 2015 (Percentage) | Median Weekly Earnings in 2015 |
|--|---|---|
| Master's Degree | 2.4 | \$1,341 |
| Bachelor's Degree | 2.8 | 1,137 |
| Associate's Degree | 3.8 | 798 |
| Some College, no Degree | 5 | 738 |
| High School Diploma | 5.4 | 678 |
| Less than a High School Diploma | 8 | 493 |

Retrieved from: https://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_001.htm

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Schools alone will not provide all the answers and solutions for all social injustices facing Africa American youth in these areas (Carey, 2016). However, the literature is now permeated with metaphors such as endangered species, epidemic of failure, and institutional decimation. with

reference to African American males (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Flowers III, 2015; Gasman et al., 2015; Harper, 2009; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Land et al., 2014). Simply stated, it appears lack of empathy has encroached in society and has accepted the widespread failure as the norm (Howard, 2008).

Most of the data over the past decade reveals Black male students in fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades are not reaching mastery level aptitude in reading, mathematics, history and science (Howard, 2008; Land et al., 2014; Roscoe, 2015). For instance, in 2009 only 13 percent of African Americans in eighth grader scored at or above the proficient reading level (Roscoe, 2015). In states such as Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana, African American students scored between 40% - 50% below basic level in mathematics (Land et al., 2014). The results can draw conclusions that African Americans, especially the youth, cannot understand or evaluate text and draw conclusions from these examinations (Land et al., 2014; Royster et al., 2015). Two concerns need to be addressed: (1) explanations of the persistent under-fulfilment of males in the school system, and (2) what potential interventions are needed to assist in improvement of the aspirations and goals of Black males (Howard, 2008).

The school structure instills opportunities to acquire knowledge and is known to influence academic achievement (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Lee & Bryk, 1988; Perry et al., 2016). Progress has been made in the educational setting, however, inequities in schooling experiences still exist and have negatively impacted African American students (Davis & Jordan, 1994, Roscoe, 2015; Royster et al., 2015). According to Garibaldi (2007), African American high school males are in a state of crisis because they consistently perform and statistically rank at the bottom of most standardized assessment and ratings of college completion. The evidence points to several unique academic and social challenges faced by this group. In fact, 22% of African

American single-headed families, their children never complete high school and live below the poverty line (Land et al., 2104; Perry et al., 2016). The absenteeism of fathers in today's households is creating a social crisis and affecting children's moral development (Wilson, Henriksen, Bustamante, & Irby, 2016). Furthermore, children who don't have fathers in their lives are linked to increased violence and truancy from school compared to children whose male figure parent play a dynamic role in their lives (Wilson et al., 2016). Statistics indicate that 69% of African American students in pre-school through the 12th grade are raised in a non-male home (Wilson, et al., 2016). African American boys also report of school support being negligible and sometimes nonexistent (Bottiani et al., 2016). This group's chance of dropping out of high school is 52%, and as much as 70% in many inner cities (Garibaldi, 2007). Furthermore, there is disproportionate suspensions and expulsions of African American males in high schools when they only account for 17% of the school population. (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Garibaldi, 2007; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Land et al., 2014). To lessen the disparity of negative cases involving African American males, it has been suggested to hire well trained, culturally sensitive teachers in the educational systems (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Garibaldi, 2007; Goings & Bianco, 2016). A sense of order and calm in school environments can be developed where expectations are determined in part by the schools' structure, curriculum and the active involvement of all the stakeholders (Adler, Kless & Adler, 1992; Bottiani et al., 2016; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Vega et al., 2015)

Since the Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education case in 1954, Garibaldi (2007) noted a steep decline of 66% in African American teachers. Currently, African American male educators account for 1% of the faculty (Garibaldi, 2007, Goings & Bianco, 2016). The disparities in African American male achievement is not only attributed to low teacher expectations, but also

inadequate school resources, poverty, inadequate parental support and lack of positive mentors (Flowers III, 2015; Garibaldi, 2007; Land et al., 2014; Perry et al., 2016). For African American male students, the perceptions of differential treatment and exclusion by teachers and other adults in school appear to play a role in their poor academic outcomes (Bottiani, Bradshaw & Mendelson, 2016). Hence, the negative impact is in the self-belief by teachers that African American male students would not go to college (Garibaldi, 2007). Lack of experience of teachers and staff working with this population means that they lack the essential skills to work effectively with them, leaving them misguided about their future (Bell, 2014; Bottiani et al., 2016; Land et al., 2014). High school accomplishment represents a critical juncture in the beginning of “real life experience” whereas the delay can significantly alter one’s life trajectory (Kirk & Sampson, 2013). One may conclude that schools in general are falling short in educating African American males and recruiting minority teachers (Goings & Bianco, 2016). On the other hand, according to Davis and Jordan (1994) African American males’ lackluster enthusiasm in their education endeavors means that they are active participants in their own educational demise. It is the end of a journey before it begins for many students of color. In the scholarly literatures, it shows that African American male population are more likely to voluntarily give up the academic life thus adding to high dropout rates (Bell, 2014). Noguera (2002) contends in respect to African American boys:

They lead the nation in homicide, both as victims and perpetrators and in what observers regard as an alarming trend; they now have the fastest growing rate for suicide. For the last several years, Black males have been contracting HIV and AIDS at a faster rate than any other segment of the population and their incarceration, conviction and arrest rates have been at the top of the charts in most states for some time. Even as babies,

Black males have the highest probability of dying in the first year of life, and as they grow older they face the unfortunate reality of being the only group in the United States experiencing a decline in life expectancy. In the labor market, they are the least to be hired and in many cities, the mostly likely to be unemployed (p.431).

Despite negative labels and structural barriers put on African American males such as poverty, attendance at poor quality schools, and lack of access to rigorous curricula, some students are excelling at high levels (Vega et al., 2015).

The Prevalence of African American Males in Higher Education

To be college ready is a process that takes time and spans from primary, secondary to higher education (Royster et al., 2015). There is a significant number of African American males failing to demonstrate college readiness (Scott et al., 2013; Royster et al 2015). Therefore, the scholastic journey of many African American males is often linked with underachievement and underrepresentation (Carey, 2016; Scott et al., 2013). Most of the research on African American underachievement presents troublesome numbers, especially those of first-generation college students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Perry et al, 2016). The pathway to college for African American male students is met with difficult challenges (Scott et al., 2013). As first-generation college students, they lack adequate academic preparation in addition to the absence of available college information tools as they strive to become first-in their family to attend school at the postsecondary level (Bottiani et al., 2016; Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Perry et al., 2016; Royster et al., 2015). The lack of knowledge about academic resources, college expectations, and likely growing up in household without a college educated parent results in the selection of less challenging academic pathways to high school graduation (Kuh et al., 2008; Perry et al., 2016; Royster et al., 2016; Stephens et al., 2015)

Palmer et al., (2009) presented perspectives in explaining lack of progress in education for African American males. According to Palmer et.al. (2009), with Fordham and Ogbu (1986), one viewpoint is a theory associated with “acting White”. The notion of acting White gained popularity after Fordham and Ogbu (1986) published an article titled “Black students and school success: Coping with the burden of acting white.” Scholars argued that the ‘burden of acting white’ has to do with a tension between academic performance and racial identity. These accusations result in negative effects on students, and that results in African American male students underachieve in high schools (Buck, 2010; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The term sends the message to those African American male students who are doing great in school that there are certain behaviors reserved for White students only (Buck, 2010). By “acting White” African American males have created a propaganda philosophy stemming from their belief of oppression, enslavement, and discrimination in their minds (Palmer et al. 2009; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Buck (2010) noted that, there are African American male students who are resilient to such notions of acting white. Furthermore, African American males are often viewed negatively in schools, and as a result, it impacts the ways teachers and administrative personnel interact with them (Goings & Bianco, 2016). To make matters worse, this population is more likely to be suspended at least once from school resulting in missing valuable in-class instruction (Goings & Bianco, 2016). Research shows a supportive relationships environment at school is linked to more positive academic engagement and behavioral outcomes which many African American male students seek (Bottiani et al., 2016; Carey, 2016).

African American males are categorized in media, books and academic journals with such terms as endangered, uneducable, dysfunctional, and dangerous (Palmer et.al 2009; Strayhorn, 2008). The record shows Black males are underrepresented in talented programs or

advanced placement courses while the overwhelming majority are in special education (Palmer et al., 2009; Noguera, 2003). A report by the Pew Charitable Trusts indicates that 1 in 100 are incarcerated in America (2008). A total of 188,550 more African American males are in jail than enrolled in institutions of higher learning (Green, 2008). Education must be viewed as the “only” passport for the African American male to a better life and elevating themselves from poverty. According to Garibaldi (2007) poverty, unemployment, disease, violence, addiction and incarceration is rampant in the African Americans male population. Individuals without postsecondary credentials will have lower lifetime earnings and are likely to remain at or near poverty levels (Museus, Yi & Saelua, 2017). A college degree defines not only ones’ earning capability but likewise promotes a good quality of life (Museus et al., 2017).

Types of Support at HBCUs

A popular African proverb states; “It takes a village to raise a child” and fundamentally means a child’s upbringing is a communal effort. It conveys the African worldview that embraces the value of family relationship, self-sacrificing concern for others (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Guiffrida, 2004; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Strayhorn & DeVita 2009). African American males face many challenges, and without enough support from a wide network of friends, family and faculty, may compromise his academic success story (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Strayhorn and DeVita, 2010). These challenges can range from entering college less academically prepared, the feeling of being isolated and adjusting to living independently, stereotype threat, depression, and lack of community connection (Asamsama, Mayo, Stillman, Mathews, Schnorr & Nelson, 2016; Brooks, 2015; Strom & Savage, 2014). Therefore, in their educational pursuit, there are multiple forms of support many African American male students receive while attending HBCUs (Asamsama et al., 2016; Herndon & Hirt, 2004, Strom &

Savage, 2014). According to Powell, Jo, Martin, Philip and Astone (2017), four broad types of supportive behaviors or acts are available to African American male students. Such support includes (1) emotional support which is characterized by expression of love, trust and care; (2) instrumental support that is aided by tangible gifts such as money and housing; (3) informational support that allows for the transfer of information through specific guidance, advice and suggestions and (4) social companionship by spending time and having recreational activities (Powell et al., 2017). Therefore, for African American male students to have the ability to deal with stress at college level, they employ different coping mechanisms which comes in different forms of support (Asamsama et al., 2016; Strom & Savage, 2014).

Faculty Support

The institutional structures of HBCUs embodies the true nature of providing support for African American college students (Flowers III, Scott, Riley & Palmer, 2015). These institutions provide helpful services such as tutoring, faculty, and peer mentoring programs that facilitates the growth and persistence of students (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Flowers et al., 2015; Herndon and Hirt, 2004). Cohen and Wills (1985) noted the vital support provided can act as a buffer zone in times of crisis. Research indicates that faculty and student interactions positively correlate with various academic outcomes as well as increasing levels of student involvement and engagement at HBCUs (Flowers III et al., 2015). In addition, African American educators go an extra-mile in assisting the basic educational needs by ensuring that students' personal and academic success is met, and adding value-added collegiate experience for African American males (Flowers III et al., 2015; Simmons, 2013). Accordingly, a healthy faculty mentoring and student interactions at HBCUs positively affects male students' satisfaction with college (Flowers III et al., 2015; Simmons, 2013). At the same time, HBCU faculty plant ideas in African Americans of post-

undergraduate aspirations (Flowers III, 2015). These acts of support may result in life-long relationships between faculty and students (Flowers III, 2015; Palmer et al., 2011). In a study completed by Cuyjet (2006), the results indicated African American male faculty shared common gender, cultural and racial experiences that helped facilitate trust and nurturing environment among African American male students.

Parental Support

Other factors cited in the literature that promotes persistence of African American males is the robust backing from their immediate families (Brooks, 2015; Guiffrida, 2004; Herndon & Hirt, 2004). Research indicates that regardless of socioeconomic status, certain aspects of parental involvement and influence impact academic persistence of African American students at HBCUs (Carey, 2016; Palmer et al., 2011). Per Carey (2016), families might have limited college experience and knowledge, but they provide needed emotional support for their children's college ambition. A parental and family participation is a predictor of students' educational aspirations, academic performance and academic adjustment (Asamsama et al., 2016; Brooks, 2015; Brooks & Allen, 2016). Therefore, a supportive parent-child and family relationship are important in academic success of African American college students (Brooks, 2015; Carey, 2016). African American families have strong emotional connection with their children that facilitate their needed support during the academic journey (Flowers III, 2015). For example, a study conducted by Palmer et al., (2009) showed a strong family and parental support contributed to African American college students' academic persistence and success. Support not only comes from nuclear families, but also from extended families and friends who have an important influence on African American students' intentions to persist in college (Brooks, 2015; Simmons, 2013).

Role of Religion

Religion and spirituality plays and provides an important part in the political, cultural, and educational setting of African Americans when facing adversity (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Dancy II, 2010; Riggins, McNeal, & Herndon, 2008; Walker, Dixon, 2002). According to Riggins, McNeal and Herndon (2008), African American male students encounter countless barriers during their academic journey often leading to stressful periods. African American male students who are “more” religious tend to experience less stressful events since they self-manage themselves and receive social and moral support than non-religious African American (Dancy II, 2010; Riggins et al., 2008). In addition, the African American churches have not only served a spiritual purpose, but have served as social support institutions (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Riggins et al., 2008; Walker & Dixon, 2002). Research suggests that African American students found two major subjects which explain the centrality of spirituality in their lives: (1) use of prayer as guidance and coping mechanism, and (2) how they receive their social support from religious groups (Riggins et al., 2008). Collectively, Brooks and Allen (2016) and Dancy II (2010), echo the same sentiments of strong spirituality in African American male students as a way to continue their collegiate experience were evident.

Conclusion

It would be an understatement to diminish the positive role HBCUs have played in uplifting African Americans’ way of life (Burrell et al., 2015; Palmer et al., 2011; Shorette II & Palmer, 2015). HBCUs’ niche in the educational setting continues to be debated for their relevance in today’s higher education (Stewart, 2015). For the underprivileged and underprepared African American males, HBCUs have been found to provide positive settings for the academic engagement and persistence (Burrell et al., 2015; Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011;

Stewart, 2015). Furthermore, HBCUs' male faculty are positioned to serve as role models with whom students can identify with (Brooks, 2015; Simmons, 2013). Throughout their inception, HBCUs have been far from equal in terms of funding and their lower endowments compared to PWIs (Paterson et al., 2013). This places HBCUs in an economic hardship that continuously threaten their viability (Paterson et al., 2013).

Despite literature trends that show African American males struggling and not completing their educational journey, there are some African American males who are graduating and transition into being productive members of society (Hines et al., 2015). Most research literature has given little or no attention into solving educational problems facing African American males in HBCUs (Harper, 2009). African American male students like many other students are expected to experience psychological stress and experience harsh realities of college adjustment problems (Asamsama et al., 2016). The purpose of the literature review highlighted the common thread of challenges and success stories that fuels the successful degree completion of African American males. The literature suggests that African American male students' likelihood of persisting through graduation depends on collegiate environment and other external support systems (Brooks & Allen, 2016).

Chapter III

Design and Methodology

“I’m a success today because I had a friend who believed in me and
I didn’t have the heart to let him down.”

-Abraham Lincoln

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of successful African American male students regarding their persistence and resilience in post-secondary institutions. This research study focused specifically on current students enrolled at a private HBCU. In addition, the male student participants were scheduled to graduate with less than three semesters left. The intent of the study sought to understand the complexity of each individual’s collegiate experience. Three quarters of the students in the study regarded themselves as first-generation students to attend college. By discovering factors that made the eight African American men graduate with all odds against them, and giving voice to their successful collegiate academic experiences, this research became valuable. Additionally, the researcher identified the reasons behind their decision to continuously persist enrolled in college. This was a milestone for students who never thought it was possible for them to graduate. Now they are at the cusp of graduating with a college/university degree.

Creswell (2015) defines qualitative research as an investigation method of understanding based on traditional inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The research was captured through the application of a phenomenological study. The essential part of using a phenomenological approach is in exploring, describing, and analyzing the meaning of individual lived experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Chapter three therefore, systematically details the

methodology and rationale of the research including research design, data collection methods, site and participation selection, data analysis plan, and reliability and validity issues of the study.

Research Questions

Creswell (2015) states that the fundamental ideas addressed in the research project are intended to establish signposts to guide the study. The research questions guided this study on the lived-experiences and views of eight African American male students at a historically Black college and university (HBCU). These enquiries establish building blocks for the collection of the data that will speak to the questions (Creswell, 2015). The crucial research questions for this research study embraced the following:

1. How do African American male students overcome challenges they encounter in college?
2. To what do African American male students attribute their academic success?
3. To what extent did the educational experience at this private HBCU influence one's decision(s) to persistently enroll until graduation without dropping out?

Research Design

The foundation of this research design was influenced by a qualitative phenomenological approach. This approach allows participants of the study to directly express their know-hows using their personal experiences without the guidance of researcher interpretation (Stapleton & Pattison, 2015). In-depth interviews were conducted with eight African American male students at a private historically Black college and university (HBCU). These interviews narrated the participants' educational experiences. The eight African American male students were senior students in college who were on a trajectory of successfully completing their degree within three or less semesters. The selection of African American participants in this study utilized purposeful

sampling. Creswell (2015) notes that in purposeful sampling, the researchers intentionally select individuals and locations to absorb or understand a central phenomenon. In qualitative research, such a method is mostly suitable for studies that seek to explore a problem or issue whereby the researcher cannot easily measure variables (Creswell, 2015). Additionally, it allows data collection to be conducted in a natural setting and promotes the participants to share their stories, and experiences in their own words (Creswell, 2015). Furthermore, the significance of a strong characteristic of qualitative study grants the voice of participants throughout the research and generates change that gives solution to the problem (Creswell, 2015). In qualitative research, the sample size tends to be small and purposefully selected. Additionally, it directly connects to the context being investigated (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In phenomenological studies, Moustakas (1994) termed this approach as it contains a return to experience in order to acquire comprehensive descriptions of the events and portrays the essences of the experience. This method ideally leads to (a) “the original records consisting of naïve descriptions acquired through open-ended questions and dialogue, and (b) the researcher describes the structures of the experiences based on thoughtful inquiry and clarification of research participant’s account or story (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13).

Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) model of academic integration and social integration provided a framework of understanding the perspectives from the viewpoint of African American male students at a private HBCU. With their own voices, it revealed their lived experiences during their educational journey. Therefore, the intent of the study sought to understand the complexity of each individual’s collegiate experience by discovering factors that made them graduate with all the odds against them. As Moustakas (1994) stated, qualitative researchers rely on depth, richness, and details to uncover the complexity sought in a qualitative design.

Participant Selection and Setting

The researcher conducted this qualitative study at a small private historically Black college established in 1873 located in the Coastal Plains of Texas. The selected HBCU has a student population of predominantly African Americans. The college offers undergraduate degrees in education, business and technology, sciences, and art and humanities, with an enrollment of 978 students. Furthermore, the institution is “committed to the principle of education access, and serves students from diverse backgrounds who have expressed a desire and potential learning in a Christian environment.”

Eight African American male students who met specific criteria were selected. In this context, being successful was defined as an individual who reached senior academic status with a GPA over 2.3., and with three or less semesters left on their degree program. The average population for a phenomenological study is between six to twenty-five participants, all had direct experience to the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2015; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Therefore, the targeted participants for this investigation research were existing African American male students enrolled at a private historically Black college and university (HBCU). The eight participants met the following criteria:

- (a) An undergraduate African American male senior student enrolled at the college with three or less semesters to graduate
- (b) Have been continuously enrolled/attendance since their freshman year
- (c) Identified themselves as African American who were born in the United States of America.

Participants were comprised of eight African American males who were on the trajectory of completing their degrees. The selection of the African American male students in this study

followed purposeful selection strategies (Creswell, 2015; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Purposeful sampling is grounded on the hypothesis that the investigator desires to learn, comprehend, and increase his/her awareness into participant's population from where the greatest can be learned (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Table 5 provides the outlook of participants' degree majors and graduation duration. The reason for the restrictions was the desire to capture a "true" persistence and resiliency of the study participants' educational journey at a private HBCU institution. No actual names were used throughout the study to promote confidentiality and maintain the participant's anonymity. The age range of the participants were from 21-24 years old. Most the students lived on campus.

Table 5

Summary of Participant Degree Majors

| Pseudonym | Major | Self-Reported GPA | Number of Years It Took to Graduate |
|------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Clayton | Business Administration | 3.4 | 5 years |
| DeVandre | Computer Information System | 2.58 | 5 years |
| Tyree | Computer Information System | 2.9 | 4 years |
| Jamal | Business Administration | 3.5 | 4 years |
| Trenton | Chemistry | 3.5 | 4 years |
| Eldrick | Criminal Justice | 2.7 | 5 years |
| Brendon | Education | 2.49 | 5 years |
| Rashaad | History | 2.3 | 6 years |

Table 6 provides information of participants' age, status on first generation college students, the number of remedial classes taken, and the anticipated graduation date. Through the registrar's office, the names of potential African American male graduates were obtained. Eight individual African American male students from four departments were identified. Therefore, their selection was based on the predetermined criterion.

Table 6

Participant Profile

| Pseudonym | Age | First to attend College | Completed Developmental Courses | Anticipated Graduation Date |
|------------------|------------|--------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Clayton | 24 | No | None | May 2017 |
| DeVandre | 23 | Yes | 1 Remedial Classes | December 2017 |
| Tyree | 23 | Yes | 2 Remedial Classes | May 2017 |
| Jamal | 25 | No | 5 Remedial Classes | May 2017 |
| Trenton | 22 | No | No Remedial Classes | May 2017 |
| Eldrick | 23 | Yes | 2 Remedial Classes | December 2017 |
| Brendon | 22 | Yes | 2 Remedial Classes | December 2017 |
| Rashaad | 24 | Yes | No Remedial | May 2017 |

After the approval from Northwest Nazarene University Institutional Review Board (Appendix A), individuals who met the criteria were contacted via email and asked to participate in the research study. The contact information for all eight African American male students was easily

obtained. Eight potential participants from the division of education, division of business and technology, division of social sciences and humanities and division of sciences made up the sample of the study. After permission was granted, an invitation letter (Appendix B) and an Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) was sent to each participant electronically. The researcher received all signed Informed Consent Forms, and a follow-up contact was initiated either through phone or email with participants.

Data Collection

Data falls into four basic categories of observation, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2009, p. 129). The researcher used interviewing technique to collect the data and it was conducted face-to-face. After being given approval from Northwest Nazarene University Institutional Research Board (IRB), the researcher contacted participants. A recruitment email (Appendix E) was sent with the description of the research and approximate time-span of interview. Merriam (2001) indicated the essence of a qualitative study, in which the researcher is the chief investigator in collecting and evaluating data, and can answer to situation(s) by capitalizing on opportunities that can occur during interviews. Furthermore, Jacob and Furgerson (2012) stated that the heart of qualitative research is its aspiration to expose the human part of a story. The data was collected over a two-day period during fall semester, 2016.

A similar format of questions was followed throughout by the researcher and guided the whole interview protocol. The researcher secured a neutral location on campus and the interviews were therefore, conducted in a quiet, comfortable and convenient for the participants. According to Creswell (2009), interviews should take place in an environment that is not intimidating for participants and where they do not feel restricted to share information. All eight interviews were audiotaped and the researcher took handwritten notes. All participants were

required to provide a signed consent form (Appendix C) before the interview. The participants were informed of potential values regarding the study preceding the interview. To protect participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned. Interviews took approximately 30-50 minutes. The responses gathered during the interview questions yielded essential data to answer to the central research questions for the study.

Pilot Interviews

The pilot study facilitated and contributed to the researchers own indoctrination of the phenomenological study in several ways. Firstly, it gave the researcher the opportunity to interact with four African American male senior students at a predominantly White institution (PWI) who had similar characteristics as the study's sample. Secondly, the pilot study refined the researcher questions and highlighted any existing gaps and shortfalls in this study. Marshall and Rossman (2016) state that a pilot study enables the researcher to understand oneself and to be mindful of/or eliminate barriers that can result during the actual study. Therefore, the pilot study helped to examine the investigator's own beliefs and behaviors in conducting interviews and offered the necessary tools and skills in collecting the data. In addition, this discovery gave the researcher confidence and removed any lingering doubts in the validity of the questions. Pilot interviews were completed prior to any formal data collection with the designated participants.

Interviews

An advantage in qualitative research is its reliance on using in-depth interviews to gather rich and useful data (Creswell, 2015). Therefore, the purpose of conducting interviews in qualitative research is to inquire and dig deeper about the ideas the interviewee has to share on a particular subject matter. Marshall and Rossman (2016) expound it this way:

Interviews have particular benefits. An interview yields data in quantity quickly. Immediate follow-up and clarification are possible. Combined with observation, interviews allow the researcher to understand the meanings that everyday activities hold for people. Interviews are often intimate encounters that depend on trust. (p. 150)

The study was conducted using a qualitative phenomenological research process (Creswell, 2015). This process allows one-on-one interviewing that permits a rich collection of data. According to Creswell (2015), interviews become the sole data source in a qualitative research study. The researcher used semi-structured, in depth interviewing with eight African American male students who were attending a private HBCU institution. The interview comprised of 20 questions (Appendix D). The questions explored personal, educational and other environmental factors that contributed to participants' success in college. The principal goal of utilizing open-ended questions was to enable the researcher to build upon and explore participants' responses and reconstruct their experiences for the rest of the people to understand their personal stories. In order to get the best from an interview, good rapport and trust with the participants was required (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012). If the investigator does not make a good connection, listen well and avoids being easily distracted, the risk of not getting the real story is in jeopardy (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012). As a researcher, the interviews offered access to eight African American male students who shared their ideas, aspirations, fears, and memories in their own words. The interviews lasted between 30 to 50 minutes and throughout the entire process, the anonymity of all participants and their institution was protected. All the interviews took place at the college library private rooms. Even though an interview guide was used, the interviews were primarily directed by the responses of the participants.

Data Analysis Plan

A qualitative study entails decisions regarding how the analysis will be conducted, and how these judgments should inform, and be informed for the rest of the design (Maxwell, 2009). Since the research study explored the lived experiences of African American male students, the analysis was thematic and interpretive. The essential part of phenomenological study is to recognize shared themes in people's descriptions of their experience (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Capturing the raw data from the interviews, the researcher used the three C's of data analysis; codes, categories, and concepts (Litchman, 2006). The following five-step model described by Litchman (2006) was used to analyze the data in the study.

Step 1: Initial coding

Step 2. Revisiting initial coding

Step 3. Developing an initial list of categories or central ideas

Step 4. Modifying your initial list based on additional rereading

Step 5. Revisiting your categories and subcategories.

Step 6. Moving from categories into concepts (themes) (p.168).

The researcher personally transcribed the interview responses. This allowed the researcher to become more intimate with the material and brought awareness of emotions from the participants as they narrated their stories. The interview responses were organized and coded manually using the three Cs from Litchman (2006); (a) codes, (b) categories, and (c) concepts. During the coding process, the researcher used different color highlighters for repetitive meaning sentences. Hence, the researcher went over again the transcripts and notes in search of similarities, themes and categories. As data was analyzed, the researcher found common codes frequently mentioned by the participants. The individual meanings were then clustered into

emergent themes. The emergent themes were listed in alphabetical order and regrouped according to significance and relatedness. As suggested by Merriam (2009), the themes that emerged were emailed to the participants to ensure accuracy and to solicit feedback regarding the drawn conclusions (Appendix G). Participant feedback was considered and the data were reviewed again. A narrative of the phenomenon of students' lived experiences in persistence and resiliency for African American male participants was formulated from the themes that emerged.

Validity Issues

According to Merriam (2009) validity “deals with the question of how research finding matches reality” (p. 213). Furthermore, a research study lies in its ability to convey information that is useful and even meaningful to scholarly inquiry (Merriam, 2009). To ensure a study's findings are sufficiently authentic, the researcher must employ validity and reliability checkpoints (Merriam, 2009). The researcher utilized member checks, peer review to reduce the possibility of bias and data misinterpretation, hence increased data validity. The solicitation of participants' feedback during initial and final data analysis prevents researcher misinterpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Merriam, 2009). The eight participants in the study were invited to participate. Each participant was emailed the preliminary outcomes and asked to comment on the accuracy, clarifications and possible change of wording. This was to ensure the results resonated with the individual experiences and to comment on the themes (Appendix G). This is the process when participants check the soundness of their responses and is the utmost effective degree of confirming their own experiences and establishing integrity (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Wilson, Onwuegbuzie, & Manning, 2016). In the process, the researcher's goal is to capture the phenomenon and present an accurate account of each participant's experience (Wilson et al., 2016). Furthermore, in peer review, colleagues familiar with the research but

not personally involved, review methods, data interpretation, findings and conclusions (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 2009).

Limitations

With any study, limitations are inevitable. In a qualitative research, there is likelihood of having some limitations centered on the individual ability of the researcher (Creswell, 2009). The selection of one HBCU allowed the researcher to primarily focus on African American males at that particular institution. Because, the study was limited to eight students, the opinions and experiences of participants may not speak to all African American male students attending HBCUs. The participants selected may vary in socioeconomic status, parental educational background and other environmental factors. On the other hand, the data may be biased since the researcher is of the same gender and race as the participants. Patton (2002) suggests that limitations in the use of data resulting from interviews may exist. Emotion may result in biased responses due to researchers' inability to separate personal feeling from reality (Patton, 2002).

Researcher as Instrument

In a phenomenology study, the researcher is interested in the analytical and descriptive experience of individuals in their everyday world (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). The researcher is the "instrument in a qualitative study" (Patton, 2002, p. 64). The credibility of the study heavily weighs on the researcher's abilities, competences, and rigor, as well as the external interferences that may be present in their life (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). In addition, "a real, live person makes observations, takes field notes, ask interview questions, and interprets responses" (Patton, 2002, p.64).

To typically define the researcher, one might make the testimonials that: He is a father. He is a husband. He is an educator. He is a leader. He is a fun man. The researcher has worked in education for over nine years, half of them as a lead instructor at a HBCU institution. Therefore, the study was impelled by the passion that came from his own personal experience while teaching at a HBCU. The desire of the researcher is to witness more African American male students succeed in higher education instead of dropping out of college. Dialogue and concern was developed during his graduate classes regarding the scarcity of African American males in higher education. By exploring the topic of persistence and resilience of African American male students, the researcher contributed more in-depth literature to the topic. Could one be an effective role model to the African American community in part because of ones' background? What defines an effective role model? How do African American male educators understand their roles and responsibilities in promoting education in their communities? These and other questions led the researcher to focus on this study. There were two potential threats to validity that center upon the researcher: bias and reactivity, also known as the observer effect (Maxwell, 2009). Reactivity takes place when participants alter their responses because they are part of a research study (Wilson, Henriksen, Bustamante & Irby, 2016). As a researcher, it is important to be able to keep reflexive notes that document how ones' own behavior and understanding may have been affected by the research process (Given, 2008). Researchers cannot be bias-free. Holding a professional role as an educator who once taught at a historically Black college, the researcher had strong beliefs regarding the need for support for all African American men at every level who are interested in education. For the researcher to avoid being biased, the use of bracketing was utilized in the research.

In phenomenological research, bracketing is an effort to embrace previous understanding or belief about the manifestation under investigation to deferment in order to accurately describe participants' life experience (Chan et al., 2013; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Fischer, 2009, Moustakas, 1994). In addition, bracketing is the first step of phenomenological reductionism. Moustakas (1994) suggest that "no position whatsoever is taken...nothing is determined in advance;" the researcher remains present, "by returning to whatever is there in ...memory, judgment, feeling, whatever is actual there" (p. 84). Acknowledging these beliefs, the researcher heeded the suggestion of Chan, Fung and Chien (2013) of having an open viewpoint approach to let unforeseen meanings to appear. However, the research proximity to the participants' experiences cannot be fully bracketed. Thus, the researcher created a reflective journal regarding the phenomenon. According to Laverly (2003), when research is conducted under phenomenological perspective, the research begins a process of self-reflection. Laverly (2003) states that the purpose of this reflection is to become aware of one's biased and assumption in order to bracket them, or set them aside, in order to engage the experience without preconceived notions about what will be found in the investigation. Due to the emotionally charged nature of the study, the researcher was able to set aside his own presuppositions and potential biases. Therefore, the researcher was able to put his own perceptions and judgments aside to achieve bracketing.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to explore the persistence and resiliency of African American male students who attended a private HBCU institution. A qualitative phenomenological research approach was therefore appropriate for exploring the lived experience of eight African American men studying at a private historically Black college and

university. This investigation focused specifically on male students who were about to graduate with less than three semesters left. The study was completed using a qualitative phenomenological research design. Semi-structured interviews were developed and used to collect narrative raw data from eight African American male students. The male student participants in the study were selected using purposeful sampling strategy. After raw data was collected and coded, themes emerged from the study.

Chapter IV

Results

It always seems impossible until it's done.

-President Nelson Mandela

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings that resulted from the interviews of eight African American male students at a historically Black college and university (HBCU). The researcher used a qualitative phenomenological design to uncover the essence of African American male students lived experiences regarding their persistence and resiliency towards graduation. The selected methodology was best suited to answer the research questions and enabled the researcher to unravel the “lived experiences” of participants (Creswell, 2009, p. 57). Therefore, the challenges of persistence and resilience by eight African American male students was defined through the lens of a metaphor. The metaphor of *Amazing Race* was used to describe each individual journey of persistence to college degree completion. The ability of eight African American male students to successfully transition from high school to a college graduate is the essence of the study.

Amazing Race vs. Academic Journey

Every academic year, thousands of African American male students matriculate into institutions of higher education with a set goal of obtaining a baccalaureate degree. However, the majority fail their quest to obtain a college diploma (Brooks & Allen, 2016). Research shows a 43% degree completion rate of African Americans based on 6-year graduation data (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Museus et al., 2017). For African American male students to succeed, they need to

be equipped with the right tools and skills to navigate the perilous academic journey successfully (Perry et al., 2016; Royster et al., 2015; Vega et al., 2015).

In the television series *Amazing Race*, eleven teams of two travel the globe in an attempt to win one million dollars. At every destination, each team must compete in different challenges, solving clues and puzzles that require both mental and physical acumen. Teams that come last at every stage of the race are eliminated. As competitors start inching closer to the finish line, the more difficult the challenges become. The first team that arrives at the final destination wins the *Amazing Race* and the million-dollar prize.

In the case of eight African American male students, they have their own amazing race every semester. They are navigating the academic and social college life. Here, the students are completing course assignments and continually assimilating into the college environment. One has to pass each level's classes and courses in order to successfully progress from freshman, to sophomore, to junior, and finally to a senior. As the finishing line nears to graduation, the motivation and focus in each student gets sharper. The college journey is unlike the television series of *Amazing Race* where the last team to arrive at the pit-stop gets eliminated. While in higher education, one has to be in good academic standing in order to progress to the next class levels. No student wants to get eliminated from this amazing academic race. However, roadblocks and detours will be encountered during the academic journey. Examples of roadblocks and detours that are encountered by African American male students include: taking remedial classes, failing and retaking a class, being placed on probation, going back home to tend for the sick members of their family, losing a scholarship, and juggling school and work to support themselves (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Farmer & Hope, 2015; Flowers III, 2015; Hines et al., 2015; Stephens et al., 2015). Inasmuch, in *Amazing Race*, the contestants are motivated by

the idea of winning a million dollars in a winner takes-all scenario. In the educational setting, the African American male students are motivated to be first in their families to actually complete a four-year degree (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Carey, 2016; Hines et al., 2015; Sciarra et al., 2016). African American male students carry the heavy burden of proving to themselves that both physical and mental barriers do not exist in their quest for higher education. The duration to the finish line can take four, five or six years, but it is their persistence and resilience that counts. The designers of *Amazing Race* relied greatly on the innate competitive drive from the participants to make the show exciting. A competitive focus requires mental resources that can impact decision making. Examples of factors that can fuel competitive awakening are time, pressure and being in the bright spotlight. In the postsecondary level, underprepared students take a longer time to graduate from college (Sciarra et al., 2016; Stephens et al., 2015). Factors that can derail on time graduation range from taking fewer credit hours, being in remedial courses and financial pressures (Hughes et al., 2013; Stephens et al., 2015; Stewart, 2015). As for African American male students, they are in the spotlight to remove the stigma associated with their lack of success in the academic world (Carey, 2016; Farmer & Hope, 2015; Gasman et al., 2015; Hines et al., 2015; Land et al., 2014).

Emergent Themes

This phenomenological study is significant because of the disproportionately small number of African American male students graduating from postsecondary institutions (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Museus et al., 2017). The latest statistics released lists that only 33% of African American males earn bachelor's degrees compared to 60% Whites and 48% Hispanics within six years (Kafele, 2012; Simmons, 2013; Strayhorn, 2014). The researcher's goal in the study was to give voice to the lived experiences of eight African American male students who had the

resilience to persist until graduation. The research questions provided the foundation for the interviews. Face-to face interviews were conducted, individually, with each participant. All participants were senior students in college on a trajectory of successfully completing their degree with three or less semesters remaining at a private historically Black college and university (HBCU). The findings are in accordance to the research questions:

1. How do African American male students overcome challenges they encounter in college?
2. To what do African American male students attribute their academic success?
3. To what extent did the educational experience at this private HBCU influence one's decision(s) to persistently enroll until graduation without dropping out?

Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model of student integration provided the framework for exploring African American male students' resilience and persistence towards graduation. Therefore, in chapter 4, the researcher presents key findings and support evidence attained from the eight African American male students at a private historically Black college and university (HBCU). The use of a semi-structured interview protocol was used to understand the experiences of eight African American male students and to garner meanings of their involvements at HBCU. The interviews were structured around four tiers of questions. Tier 1, entitled "Student life in context", asked participants to tell of their experiences during high school. In addition, they were asked to share stories of their upbringing. Tier II, entitled "Why choose an HBCU", focused on each participant's reasons for attending the selected college. Tier III, was entitled "Reflection on and the meaning of college persistence and resiliency". The researcher asked participants their thoughts regarding academic and social integration at the selected college. Lastly in Tier IV,

entitled “What does a college degree mean to you?” Questions focused on removing the stereotype label placed on African American males and what the degree meant to their families.

The results of the interviews were organized according to research questions. Three themes emerged from the study. Themes are described as “fasteners, foci, or threads around which phenomenological descriptions are facilitated” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 91). During the process of consolidating the themes, the researcher was able to find participants voice, and meanings of their lived experiences of persistence and resiliency at a private HBCU. Table 7 represents three themes and categories that emerged from the rich data.

Table 7

List of Three Themes and Categories

| Research | Interview Tier | Themes | Categories |
|---------------------|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| Question # 1 | Tier 1: Student life in context: Individual(s) who made an impact in their life? | Influential People | Family, faculty, The Obama effect, High school English teachers |
| Question # 2 | Tier III & IV: Participant life reflections and the meaning of a college degree | In Face of Adversity, I Stay Strong. | Raised in single-parent household, Not a college ready student. |
| Question # 3 | Tier II: Why choose an HBCU? | College Enriching Experiences | Supportive college environment, Sense of belonging. Mentors. |

Table 7. Emergent themes and categories under the research questions.

Research Participants' Profile

Eight African American male students participated in the study. Participants were given the pseudonyms of Clayton, DeVandre, Tyree, Jamal, Trenton, Eldrick, Brendon, and Rashaad. These students were passionate, engaged, and provided stories of their lived experiences. The expression of participants' frankness and authenticity in their voices provided the powerful aspect to this investigation. The participants were selected based on specific criteria. The criteria included race (African American), birthplace (born in the United States), gender (male), and college level (upperclassmen with two or three semesters remaining). The participants in this study ranged from 22 – 25 years of age and had an average cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.3 out of a 4.0 scale. All eight African American male students were college seniors with an anticipated graduation date of either May 2017 or December 2017. Table 8 includes a breakdown of participants' majors, first-generation college status, self-reported GPA and future degree aspirations.

Table 8

Participants Academic Profile and Future Degree Aspirations

| Participant Pseudonym | Major | First-Generation College Students | Self-Reported GPA | Future Degree Aspirations |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Clayton | Business Administration | NO | 3.4 | MBA |
| DeVandre | Computer Information System | YES | 2.58 | None |
| Tyree | Computer Information System | YES | 2.9 | None |
| Jamal | Business Administration | NO | 3.5 | M.S. Hospitality Management |
| Trenton | Chemistry | NO | 3.5 | Ph.D. Material Science |
| Eldrick | Criminal Justice | YES | 2.7 | Juris Doctorate (J.D) |
| Brendon | Education | YES | 2.49 | M.Ed. Education |
| Rashaad | History | YES | 2.3 | None |

The academic aspirations for some (63%) of participants were not only to complete a four-year degree but continue into graduate school. In this case, Clayton, Jamal, Trenton, Eldrick, and Brendon were motivated to continue to graduate school to pursue a master's, professional (i.e. J. D), or doctoral degree. According to the participants, the push to think beyond a four-year degree came from their mentors who were also their professors. The different life circumstances from the eight participants did not stop them from dreaming beyond this HBCU College. All eight participants expressed the desire to make a huge difference in their lives as well as the communities they lived and provide their families with sound financial futures.

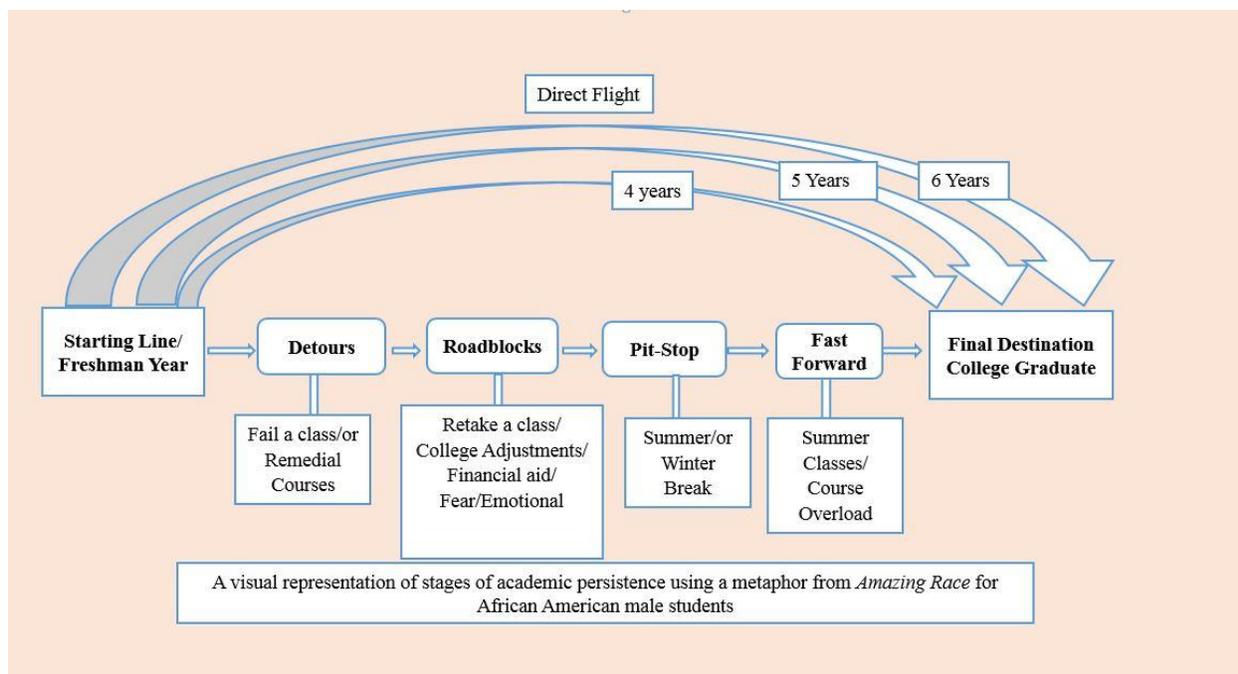
Out of the eight participants, five (Tyree, Jamal, Trenton, Brendon, and Rashaad) were raised in single-family households. Additionally, these five participants were also first-generation college students. Furthermore, these five individual participants acknowledged their fathers did not play a significant role in their childhood, adolescent, or adult years. The absence of a male figure-head in a family can have a negative impact on male children (Wilson et al., 2016). Therefore, the consequence of an absentee father affects a child's moral development as well as being a major contributing factor leading to crime, poverty, and poor educational achievement (Wilson et al., 2016). However, for Tyree, Jamal, Trenton, Brendon, and Rashaad, the absence of their fathers was not a deterrent in their educational dreams. Contrary to this, it made the five young men role models within their individual families. The other three participants (Clayton, DeVandre, and Eldrick) came from a two-parent household with both parents having at least a bachelor's degree. Clayton, DeVandre and Eldrick's parents also obtained their first degree at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Besides having father figures in their lives, these three participants wanted expressed a desire to do better than their parents. They were not only motivated to continue with their education, but to be good stewards of their family names. Throughout their statements, they continuously expressed a need to invest their time in their communities by being mentors and role models to other African American youths.

The transformation of eight African American male students in the study exemplifies the way HBCUs mold men into proud, and goal-oriented adults. The participants spoke about their experiences as African American male students at a private historical Black college and university. From the statements, eight African American male students hold the promise of providing strong leadership, and being good ambassadors for other African American youths due

to their academic success and aspirations. This particular HBCU welcomes all students who wish to be educated, regardless of previous academic grades. While themes were discovered and used as a means for explaining the lived experiences of African American male students regarding their college persistence. The experiences of the participants indicate that these emergent themes played a significant role in their educational journey. As a result, the lived experiences are vital to African American male students' capability to persist enrolled at a HBCU.

The research questions will be addressed with vivid descriptive narrative passages from the eight African American male students and supported by direct quotes from participants. In a phenomenological study, the participants describe their thoughts, feelings, and use of examples or metaphors in portraying their lived experiences from their point of view (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, a flow chart of persistence using the metaphor of *Amazing Race* will depict a flight taken by each individual participant. Figure 4 represents the persistence of amazing academic journeys of eight African American male students.

Figure 4

The Persistence of Eight Participants in Amazing Academic Journey

A Visual Representation of Stages of African American Male Students' Academic Persistence
(created by author)

Results for Research Question One: Overcoming Challenges in College

To fully answer the first research question, participants were asked to describe factors that contributed to their self-confidence in overcoming academic and social challenges at the college. To the eight participants, failure was not an option. Even though there were detours and roadblocks in their educational paths, the eight participants were able to conquer the academic challenges. Along their academic journey, there were individuals who had a direct or indirect impact in the eight participants' college success. Beyond believing in themselves, the eight participants indicated the presence of multiple people during their postsecondary accomplishments. Table 9 provides the frequency of response codes. These individuals made a positive impact to eight participants while in college.

Table 9***Influential People***

| Individuals' who made a positive Impact | Frequency of Description |
|--|---------------------------------|
| A relationship with parents/guardians | 8 of 8 participants |
| President Obama | 8 of 8 participants |
| The role of faculty | 8 of 8 participants |
| Influence of high school teachers | 7 of 8 participants |
| The Chaplain/Pastor | 2 of 8 participants |
| Friends from home | 2 of 8 participants |

A theme emerged from the frequency codes in Table 9. To overcome college challenges, eight African American male students relied heavily on their immediate families for financial and emotional needs, faculty for academic support, English high school teachers for moral support, and the encouragement from the Obama presidency. This group of key players had a pivotal role in all eight participants' college success.

Themes for Research Question One

| <u>Themes</u> | <u>Categories</u> |
|--------------------|---|
| Influential People | Family, faculty, the Obama effect, High school English teachers |

Family

All eight participants reflected on how the support from their immediate families' played a significant role in their life and academic goals. In all cases, at least one parental or guardian

figure was very supportive of the decision to pursue a postsecondary education. Some of the participants might have come from broken homes, but all received the love and encouragement that allowed them overcome challenges in college.

The scope and depth of family influence in academic success was different. For Jamal, Trenton, Rashaad, Tyree, and Brendon, despite growing up in different parts of the country, their stories were identical. All five of these African American males gave high praises to their mothers and grandmothers, crediting these families as their source of success. Each of these participants were raised in a single-parent household, either by their mother or grandmother. Across all five participants neither the mother nor grandmother had a college degree. For Jamal and Trenton, their mothers worked many long hours, and they recalled memories of spending more time with their grandmothers. The five male participants all grew up in a predominantly African American community in the inner city. Each expressed individually that their guardian, their mother or grandmother had very strong vocal advocacy for higher education. As the five participants indicated, their parents believed that a college degree would lessen the probability of their sons' experiencing the same lives that they had. They demanded excellence in their academic pursuit even in times of college despair. Jamal explained, "My mother was a very strong lady, a fighter... Deep down, she wanted me to have my father around. The only things she cared was for me to go to college and get a degree". Tyree echoed the same sentiments for his grandmother. "My biggest motivator...my grandmother, she was just a difference maker in my life. She wanted me as the first-grandson to at least get a four-year degree. She went further and said 'please do not live the life that I have lived'". Jamal, Trenton, Tyree, and Brendon all learned structure, responsibility, and courage from the rigor and demands of their home life which transferred to college adjustments. Without their home life experiences, these four

participants agreed that it would have been a big challenge to adjust to postsecondary life. The expectations from each mother or grandmother was for the participants to be in college and do well. While discussing his experiences in post-secondary education, Brendon stated:

Definitely, my grandmother kept me going here at this college. If you knew how supportive she is, you will understand. I love her to death. She told me to appreciate the opportunity that I have now and take advantage of it. This opportunity is for generations to come. I am setting a good example for my siblings and others who are coming behind me. It is so funny or sad to say this, but I have encountered so many roadblocks here at college, however, I have managed to overcome them. I will be graduating soon.

Jamal, Trenton, Rashaad, Tyree, and Brendon, each had a fear of staying in the same environment. For them, obtaining a college degree was a way out of the inner city. At one point, each individual participant indicated the hardships experienced by their mothers or grandparents. The hardships expressed correlated with a lack of postsecondary degree. Either mothers or grandmothers regretted part of their lives for not attending college and reflected on life accomplishments of not having a college degree. The five African American men believed the principles their mothers or grandmothers taught, not only made them great believers in education but made them resilient. Jamal, Trenton, Rashad, Tyree, and Brendon were all motivated to get a college degree to secure their personal and family's financial futures. Education was their means to an end, to meet the ever-changing economy that now requires a postsecondary degree.

High School English Teachers

The process of formal education learning starts early from preK -12 to postgraduate level. Along the way, students interact with teachers, administrators, and professors. There is always a

small number of educators who believe in their students, especially those on the fringe of dropping out of school or college. As in the case of *Amazing Race*, the contestants depend on the support of each other as team members to navigate around the world. In this phenomenological investigation, seven out of the eight (88%) male students (Clayton, Tyree, Jamal, Brendon, DeVandree, Eldrick, and Rashaad), consistently mentioned their English high school teachers as individuals who had a huge impact in their educational journey. Clayton recalls his junior year in college, a period of time when he was not doing well in history and English literature classes: I just made a call to my former high school English teacher...just to get an assurance from her that I can do this. The reassurance from the teacher cemented his self-belief that he can do it. Clayton reflected that his high school English teacher once told him, “You have a purpose in life” from there he knew he could overcome any small setbacks during his academic journey. These same sentiments were mentioned by other students in regards to their former English high school teachers. Eldrick stated that the influence of his high school English teacher changed fundamentally the way he now sees the importance of an education. He contributed his desire to go past a four-year degree and intends to pursue a law degree (Juris Doctorate) to the role his high school English teacher plays, and continues to play in his life.

Collectively, the high school English educators made a huge difference in the lives of seven out of the eight participants’ lives, and are still actively involved in their education endeavors. Jamal added how much his high school teacher means to him.

I remember during my high school...I was a shy student but my English teacher saw something ‘special’ in me. She encouraged me to join the poetry writing club. From then onwards, she encouraged me to go to college, especially an HBCU. Every now and then, she sends me encouraging notes checking on my academic welfare.

To the seven participants (Clayton, Tyree, Jamal, Brendon, DeVandree, Eldrick and Rashaad), their high school English teachers were their cheerleaders to these African American male students. Firstly, their English teachers believed in these young African American male students, when every other educator during high school dismissed them as trouble makers with no postsecondary inspirations. For the seven participants, their moral support and guidance is credited to English high school teachers. According to Brendon, “It started with one person ... who believed in me in high school ...that was my English teacher.” Brendon expounded on this experience and stating, “My high school English teacher was an ‘angel’ from heaven...when I look at my situation today... I’m able to overcome any challenges that I encounter here at college, because one person, she believed in me and I will never let her down.”

Voicing their displeasure, the participants perceived their high schools as not adequately preparing them for the academic challenges in colleges. None of the participants took part in advanced learning opportunities such as Advanced Placement (AP) level classes. Seven of the participants (88%) believed that it was divine intervention from their English teachers that they have been successful in college. It was their English teachers who made a difference in their academic dreams.

Faculty

African American male faculty members’ influence permeated much of the participant discussions. Their participation was the norm for those students who were willing to be guided and motivated in their academic journey. During the interview, Clayton, DeVandre, and Eldrick discussed the role of African American male professors’ in regards to the support of their education at this HBCU. The three participants had attended a predominantly White high school and had been taught by all Caucasian teachers. Common phrases Clayton, DeVandre, and

Eldrick heard during their respective high schools were, “You aren’t smart enough...no college will accept you.” The three participants stated that the negative African American male students’ stereotype continued during their high school life even though they were from a middle-class family. From their overall perspectives, they graduated high school against all odds. On the other hand, the transition to an HBCU college was different both academically and culturally. They were not used to seeing the make-up of minority faculty members. Clayton, DeVandre, and Eldrick discussed their educational and life experiences with frustrations. They upheld many stereotypes of themselves for too long. In high school, there was no reason to engage with their teachers. The teachers did not fully understand them. It was a reflection during high school that made being African American difficult. On the other hand, enrolling college at an HBCU made a huge difference. They explained that African American male professors provided emotional stability which resulted in self-worth and higher esteem of themselves. Eldrick went further in his explanation, “When I came to this college, I was not mentally and academically prepared, but the love and patience of some of my professors made me realize that college was my only way to a better life...I hope.” Furthermore, the three participants stated that having someone who believed in them was the key in overcoming any educational challenges. As for DeVandre, Tyree, Jamal, Eldrick, and Brendon who completed developmental courses, firstly, they expressed having self-doubt about their academic success. However, each of them described how the professors made them realize their full academic potential was ahead of them. Therefore, the professors’ willingness to reach out kept the participants encouraged. It was a two-way street in terms of their relationship with their professors. As long they put in the effort to study and come to class, professors were willing to assist. The assurance given to them made them want to persist. They took advantage of tutoring and hard work. Trenton recalled some words of wisdom

from one male professor, “It is imperative to burn the midnight oil studying, arriving early to class and sharing your academic success with others.”

Rashaad, DeVandre, and Eldrick had similar stories after encountering one professor. All emotional, they stated, Professor Wonder (pseudonym name) told a story about how he was ridiculed in high school because of his stammering. He wanted to quit but did not. Professor Wonder had these good words of wisdom to them.

1. The only person you can count on is always yourself. Love yourself, talk great to yourself and trust God. No one can lead you in the wrong way apart from yourself.
2. Be strong and your mind should be here on campus. We are here to study, we are here to be the best and strive to be God’s children.
3. Anything is possible, what is taking you so long. Yes, barriers are out there already for you, it is upon yourself to conquer them and for you to become great.

All participants agreed that their life was like a movie. They were the writer, director, and the producer. This was an *Amazing Race* for eight African American male students to overcome their academic challenges. It was their choice for either success or failure. For academic success to occur in and outside, the participants had to learn to establish good relationships with mostly African American male professors.

The Obama Effect

All eight African American male students had the same sentiments regarding former President Obama. The Obama effect gave them more ammunition to dream big dreams. Clayton emphatically said, “I love Obama, and the way he rose up to become the first African American President.” Even though the participants acknowledge the countless successful African

American men in society, the Obama effect was more real to them. Having a president who looks like them made participants to be more ambitious in their goals in life. Eldrick stated, “He gave Black people hope. If he became president, I could be a president as well. He gave us direction.” However, during the President’s tenure, the participants’ expressed that they saw a leader of the free world attacked on my fronts. Rashaad, Clayton, and Trenton spoke similarly ideas stating that in social media, racist jokes are common...and even within the walls of Congress, he [President Obama] was publicly disrespected.

The eight participants agreed that President Obama served the country with integrity, respect and honor to overcome challenges and barriers he encountered during his terms of office. One of the participants stated that, “as for African American men in general, President Obama made us look good and we can achieve anything if we study hard.” Trenton further elaborated on the significance of President Obama, “Now we can put our foot print into this world in a positive way not just for typical reasons African Americans are known for: sports, music etc.” For the eight African American participants, President Obama demonstrated resilience and ability to move forward.

Results for Research Question Two: Attributing to their Academic Success

When considering the persistence of participants’ path to degree completion, an outside observer can conclude that it was a phenomenon. A phenomenon for the eight African American male students to even get into the doors of higher education. A phenomenon because of being first-generation college students as well as having low socio economic status. Table 10 provides an overview of frequency codes for research question two.

Table 10

In Face of Adversity, I stay Strong.

| The odds of Succeeding in College | Frequency of Description |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Low high school preparation for college | 7 of 8 participants |
| From a single-parent household | 5 of 8 participants |
| Attending an HBCU | 3 of 8 participants |

One major theme with two strong categories that focused on how African American male students attribute their academic success emerged in this study. In spite of being raised in single-parent households and not adequately prepared for college level rigor, the eight participants were able to rise to the occasion of succeeding in their academic journey. For the participants, society's negative general impression served as source of motivation. They developed confidence and determination to succeed and persist towards degree completion.

Themes for Research Question Two

| <u>Themes</u> | <u>Categories</u> |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| In Face of Adversity, I Stay Strong. | Raised in single-parent household, Not a college ready student. |

Raised in Single-Parent Household.

“My grandmother said it jokingly to me when I was about 14 years old, ‘Please do not be like your old crazy dad who was a high school dropout’”, quipped Tyree. According to Tyree,

his grandmother meant it well. “She did not want me be like my dad. He was not part of my life.” As Tyree recalled, he has always carried that message with him.

For Tyree, the message was his guiding force to stay strong and prove to his grandmother that he was going to be a different man. Despite being raised in a single-parent household, Rashaad, Trenton, and Brendon also expressed an internal motivation to succeed academically. Brendon’s mentality was, “If I fail to get a good grade or pass in my classes that is the end of seeing freedom. I grew up in the projects. I am tired of seeing extreme poverty in the neighborhood.” Freedom for these African American males meant helping their mothers’ siblings, and family as well as being a productive member of society. They knew the consequences of dropping out of college. All remembered hearing the talk in high school as Trenton recalled, “If one doesn’t have a good education, one cannot find a good job.” As Tyree, the fear of disappointing came from siblings. Both were very enthusiastic to disclose their personal life experiences. As Rashaad recalled his past:

I started rebelling against my mother when I was a teenager. I did shoplifting, almost joined a local gang and tried selling drugs. I just wanted to take care of my siblings and enjoy the fast money. When a friend of mine was killed during a drive-by-shooting, it totally changed my whole life.

Situation such as these served as wakeup calls for both Rashaad and Tyree. This was a chance for them to put their lives in order. Both expressed that it was either getting an education or most likely ending up in a morgue or penitentiary. They were the oldest and hence reluctant to disappoint their siblings. They saw themselves as role models in the immediate family as well as in the community. Tyree expressed, “it is not easy to be the first one in your family to go to

college. All your siblings are looking up to you. It is pretty hard man, but you have to continue marching on because you're the beacon of the family.”

Rashaad, Tyree, Brendon, and Trenton came from homes that were not stable economically. Rashaad and Tyree's home life wasn't great and sometimes they had big disagreements with their mothers. They were a very transient family. Rashaad and Tyree's family lived in local projects, which were government subsidized apartments. Both mothers did not have a college degree, however, they all wanted their sons to do well. In Rashad and Tyree's case, the fear of disappointing their mother, especially, was a factor that contributed to their academic persistence in college. Tyree stated:

I guess it was during my junior year when my grades at the end of the semester were not great. I had a feeling of fear to let my mother know about the grades and the way she would react. Yes, she would love me no matter what, but after that, she was disappointed.

From them onwards, I turned my grades around.

The four participants expressed the fear of having to stay in the same inner city environment and continuously facing the similar predicament of academic limitation that had been the norm.

Rashaad, Tyree, Brendon, and Trenton, collectively expressed that there were many excuse to give up, but that they did not. Therefore, a sense of the participants breaking the misfortune of continuing the cycle of struggles, prompted academic persistence.

Not a College Ready Student

The literature highlighted the failure of African American male educational underachievement. African Americans are portrayed as incapable, unintelligent, disadvantaged, and at-risk to fail at best (Flowers III, 2015; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Roscoe, 2015; Washington, 2013). “The system is broken towards our group” retorted Trenton. “Most of the time, we are

prejudged and society at large, always has some negative things to say to us.” Such judgment was expressed to take place in the educational setting, workplace as well as in public places. All participants agreed that most of the academic challenges they encounter in postsecondary education starts before reaching a college or university campus. Even though, the eight African American male students differed in their perceptions on the deeper root-causes of the challenges facing this population, they all agreed that effective changes need to occur on both fronts (the African American community and the education system as a whole). The participants cited high school unpreparedness and home environment issues as some of the contributing factors for not being fully-ready for college work. Table 11, depicts the characteristics of all participants had in common by how they are generally viewed by society.

Table 11

Characteristics of how Participants are perceived by Society at Large

| | | | | |
|------------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Materialistic | Absentee Fathers | Meant to Struggle | Violent | Drug Dealers |
| Thugs | Fearful | Unemployable | Poor | Failure to Black Women |
| Wasted Potential | Intimidating | Angry | Substance Abusers | Great in Sport |
| Greedy | Lazy | Arrogant | All Black people look alike | Black People don't trip |

Eldrick noted assertively, “Yeah, it’s depressing continuously hearing people talking crazy about us since we were young...Come on people, all African American men are not the same.” The social media has advanced rapidly in the negative portrayal and societal stereotypes of African American males in general. All eight participants agreed that there is a need to alter

peoples' perception of whom they are starting within the African American culture. Collectively, they stated that this start with everyone being educated. The stereotypes might not end, but the real issue is for these African American males to be comfortable within themselves since they cannot control how other people think. On the other hand, they all acknowledged that every race struggles, but it is the system that has made their ethnicity look bad. As DeVandre reinforced, "Again, just look at how inner city schools are run, it is depressing."

Brendon and Eldrick added that some of their friends, African American male students, were never taught study skills and time management in high school. Eldrick stated, "Now in college, we are needing assistance to learn how to study." Similarly, Trenton added, "When I came to this college, I wasn't mentally and academically prepared but the love and patience of some of my professors made me realize that college was my only way to a better life...I hope it is true." DeVandre and Rashaad added, that their focus at first was just on getting away from home and not necessarily obtaining a degree. They wanted to run from the poverty-stricken community they resided. However, getting to college opened their eyes and they embraced the beauty of actually attending college. In addition, the students' new perspective of college contradicted their high school experiences. According to Tyree, being here at this college has helped him to see beyond the borders of his neighborhood. The new atmosphere at this HBCU put the fears, and frustrations behind them. They deeply knew that to win the academic race the onus was purely on them to work hard. The environment was conducive enough to succeed. "This journey has been good so far. I have survived college life," expressed Brendon. The views of all eight African American male students were summarized by Clayton, "You can have an impact in life by understanding the importance of having a college degree." For these eight

participants, college was a pipeline to opportunity. “My circle of influence in college made me persist...I am no longer a loser.”

Results for Research Question Three: The Decisions to Persistently Enroll until

Graduation without Dropping Out

The eight African American male students all expressed that being part of a college that was warm and welcoming was important. The college was filled with peers who did not judge other students. Table 12 provides the frequency codes from the interviews related to the decision to persistently enroll until graduation without dropping out.

Table 12

College Enriching Experiences

| Motivation to succeed | Frequency of Description |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A welcoming college environment | 8 of 8 participants |
| The culture of the college | 8 of 8 participants |
| Professors as mentors | 7 of 8 participants |
| Student organization/fraternities | 4 of 8 participants |

All eight participants expressed that being involved in on-campus academic and social support groups provided them a safe environment. From the frequency codes, college enriching experiences emerged as the theme for research question three. Three categories supported the themes: 1) Supportive college environment; 2) sense of belonging; and 3) mentors.

Themes for Research Question Three

| <u>Themes</u> | <u>Categories</u> |
|-------------------------------|---|
| College Enriching Experiences | Supportive college environment, Sense of belonging, Mentors |

Supportive College Environment

Upon arrival to this college, DeVandre recalled being in awe seeing many well-dressed African American college students as on campus. As he remembered, DeVandre took this mission to heart and it changed the way he was conducted himself at this “prestigious institution.” For some student participants, this HBCU gave them the opportunity to transform themselves into proud, responsible, and potentially educated African American men. As one participant recalled, “... I wasn’t mentally and academically prepared...and now I realize that college is my only way to a better life.” Many of the participants (5 of 8) explained that they were now equipped for college and even dreaming of obtaining a post-graduate degree. The credit many of their achievements and dreams are to their professors. They felt the professors especially African American male instructors were more patient and facilitated a yearning in them to become “better” students. All expressed a feeling of being welcomed at this HBCU institution.

Five of the participants (Clayton, DeVandre, Tyree, Rashaad, and Eldrick) selected this particular HBCU because of its historical significance in the African American community. It was their first college choice pick after graduating from high school. My six uncles and two aunties all graduated from this college, beamed Clayton. They encouraged me to apply and mentioned many good things about this college. All my uncles are very successful in their

respective career paths. For me, it was an easy choice to come to this college, as Clayton elaborated. As for DeVandre, Tyree, and Eldrick, they learned about this particular college through their high school counselors. All three high school counselors attended different prestigious HBCUs and knew how supportive a HBCUs institution can be, especially to students who are on the borderline of dropping-out of high school. According to three participants (DeVandre, Tyree, and Eldrick) if it was not for their high school counselors, it was highly likely they were going to end up attending a community college. Jamal sought to attend HBCU for a different reason. He graduated from a predominantly White high school and directly mentioned that he was, "Tired of White people...and their stereotype." The only way to free himself was to be surrounded by other African American students and professors, overall, our campus environment and culture promotes racial pride. Jamal expressed an overwhelming belief that his academic needs are being met because of the HBCU.

For the other two participants (Clayton and Eldrick), both parents were HBCUs alumni and proudly encouraged their sons to attend HBCUs. Clayton and Eldrick indicated that this college was not their first choice but wanted to attend a different HBCU in another state. Because of their procrastination in applying to those selective HBCU, they were unable to get into their first choice postsecondary institution. Both do not regret coming to this college and are enjoying every minute of it. Six of the participants (75%) knew each other very well, either taking classes together or in their fraternity houses. Each sentiment expressed by these six men indicated a strong bond among them. They bonded together and became brothers. They studied together and encouraged each other. Rashaad once wanted to quit during his sophomore year. His friends talked him out of it and discussed the greater good in getting a degree. Although

there were some barriers obstructing Rashaad's immediate college success, he decided he would not give up.

Sense of Belonging

"I am Black and I am proud." These were the words uttered in some form by all eight African American male students. From student body interactions, and being surrounded by African American professors, the participants provided significant reasons for attending an HBCU. The acknowledgment from everyone pointed to this statement, "Attending HBCU, ones get saturated in African American culture...that makes one proud to be an African American male student and proud as a person in general." Looking back on his education experience, Jamal believed, "If I had gone to a PWIs, I would have dropped-out of college during my first semester. We are a family here for most of the time and this school...it is a great institution for many African Americans." The eight participants described how comforting it was to be surrounded by people who look like them as well as not feeling pre-judged by one another. Clayton explained:

By having the experience of being amongst other African Americans in classes, it builds confidence in many of us African American male students...most of us, came to this college with low self-esteem because we were told many times that we were not good enough.

One frequently quoted African proverb says, "It takes a village to raise a child," and it is directly applicable to the eight African American male students in this study. Each male student in the study recognized that their academic successes were not purely genius on their part, but came in the form of help and support along the way. For instance, Trenton described, "I'm part

of this beautiful community.” Jamal provided insight as to how he felt to be part of this community:

Life is good here, and I wish every African American male can attend an HBCU institution. The whole college experience is an eye opener. Now, I can hold a meaningful conversation with anyone and my confidence is now high.

It is important to understand that the eight African American male students’ academic and social success is a byproduct of their positive sense of belonging. To capture a sense of belonging between the eight African American participants, phrases like, “they have my back,” “we’re all in it together,” “we’re a family,” and “I finally feel like I belong here.” cemented the true friendship found at this institution. Clayton and Eldrick were active members of the Student Government Association, Jamal was the treasurer of National Society of Minorities in Hospitality, Trenton was a paid member of National Society of Black Engineers and Rashaad, Brendon, DeVandre, Tyree, and Clayton were members of a fraternity. According to Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993), a student’s involvement increases college satisfaction. The involvement in student organizations did encourage the participants to have a sense of college belonging and instilled more self-confidence in themselves. These were some of the statements from the students:

“I felt more confidence in myself than ever before” – Clayton.

“It was one of my best college experience to be part of a focused organization” – Trenton

“This was an eye-opening experience for me to be part of an organization that took educational field trips” – Eldrick.

“I loved the fraternity brotherly love towards each other” – Jamal

Mentors

Participants' relationship with their professors is a true example of a "two-way learning process" that eight African American male students described. It is through the interactions either in the classroom or outside that made the students feel supported in their educational goals. Seven out of the eight participants (88%) indicated that they had African American male professors as mentors. One of the student, who did not have a mentor, acknowledged the important role of being mentored. Trenton stated, "It can be very powerful to be mentored. I do not have a mentor but I have people that I look at from far-away like my professors and they do inspire me."

For the other students, the general perception likened African American male professors as true parental guardians away from home. As one of the African American male students described, "Teachers are like my parents...they are a father figure to us." Therefore, same-race mentorship enhanced the relationship between the students and the male African American professors. Eldrick, Brendon, and Tyree believed mentors that have similar backgrounds as them, could relate better to their circumstances. Brendon stated, "It helps since the male professors can relate to the culture and upbringing." Eldrick and Tyree had similar sentiments, "I can tell them almost anything and they can understand my point-of-view." Furthermore, "It feels good that a fellow brother, an educated African American men, can have such knowledge and are willingly to help us to better ourselves."

All participants explained that mentors gave them guidance by reinforcing their academic goals and dreams. Hence, to some participants, it validated their prior interest and opened doors for other academic avenues. The six participants that had mentors pointed the benefits of having such great professors in their academic journey. They all concluded that mentors were resource

providers, encouragers, and confidence builders. “Oh my God,” as Brendon expressed how grateful he was of his mentor. “My mentor boosted my self-confidence that I was lacking. It is like having you own private cheerleader.” The whole mentoring experience received by the six African American male participants gave them direction in an environment where there was limited information for minority students.

Selected Significant Statements

As shown in Table 13, the researcher identified individual participant statements that stood out from the interview. The statements represent non-repetitive, significant personal voices echoed during the interviews. These statements were subjectively extrapolated from the transcripts. The researcher did not group these statements or attempt to order them in any way. The purpose was simply to learn how each participant viewed their own motivation for persistence and resiliency during this academic journey. Therefore, going through these statements provides details about how eight African American male students persevered at a private historical Black college and university.

Table 13

Selected Significant Statements

-
- My biggest motivator...my grandmother, she was just a difference maker in my life.
 - I believe your upbringing can either impact you in a positive or negative way in your life. For myself...I decided to take the right path...going to college.
 - It started with one person, who believed in me in high school...that was my English teacher.
 - My circle of influence in college made me persist...I am no longer a looser.
 - Going to weekly chapel had great influence for me in deciding to stay in college
 - For African American men, I think President Obama made us look good and now I can do anything if I study hard.
 - Life is good here and I wish every African American male can go to college. The whole college experience is an eye opener. I can hold a meaningful conversation with anyone and my confidence is now high.
 - I had so many excuses to give up, but I didn't.
 - This journey has been good so far. I have survived college life.
 - I came out of my shell.
 - The Chaplain tells great lessons of life.
 - A lot of sleepless nights doing assignments, sacrificing friends, and romantic relationships.
 - My mother was a very strong lady, a fighter. Deep down she wanted me to have my father around. The only things she cared was for me to go to college and get a degree.
 - When I came to this college, I wasn't mentally and academically prepared but the love and patience of some of my professors made me realize that college was my only way to a better life...I hope it is.
 - I am part of the community.

- You can have an impact in life by understanding the importance of having a college degree.
- I believe without this college, (HBCU), if I had gone to a predominately White school, I would have dropped-out of college during my first semester. We are a family here for most of the time and this school...it is a great institution for many African Americans.
- It can be very powerful to be mentored. I don't have a mentor but I have people that I look at from far away like my professors and they do inspire me a lot.
- I am going back to my community to give back and show other African America men that one can succeed and graduate with a four-year degree coming out from these poor neighborhoods.
- Male professors are like my parents...they are a father-figure to me.
- Here at this college, they are so many beautiful girls and I want to find my soulmate here, an educated one, with same career aspirations as mine.
- When I witnessed my father getting his master's degree and I knew I was going to follow his footsteps.
- I didn't realize that now, I have incredible influence on so many people here at the college and back home.
- I am Black and I am proud.
- Overall, our campus environment and culture promotes racial pride.
- I failed two classes...in-fact with Fs. This my wakeup call and I never messed up again.
- I am so glad... I was given an opportunity to come here when my high school grades were not that good. This is my second chance and I am going to use it to the fullest.
- As each semester went by, and now going to my fifth year, I realized that I cannot drop-out of college.
- It is not easy to be the first one in your family to go college. All your siblings are looking up to you. It is pretty hard man, but you have to continue marching on because you are the beacon of the family.
- Too much love here...we are a family and we motivate each other.

- It takes a lot of studying, a lot of interaction with your classmates and helping each other to make good life choices. Most of us...we come from troubled neighborhoods. Sometimes it is a miracle that I am here and almost done with college after 6 years of hard work.
 - As an educated Black man, I am no longer viewed as a thug.
-

Summary of Results

Research of eight African American male students who shared common experiences of persistence and resiliency at a private historically Black college and university was performed. The researcher utilized the method of phenomenological interview technique for data collection. The analysis of the data produced three theme clusters: 1) Influential people; 2) In face of adversity, I stay strong; and 3) College enriching experiences. Participants offered factors which contributed to their academic and social integration. In addition, each theme reflected the eight African American male students' lived experiences as they continued towards degree completion at a HBCU.

Chapter V

Discussion

“If you live long enough, you’ll make mistakes. But if you learn from them, you’ll be a better person. It’s how you handle adversity, not how it affects you. The main thing is never quit, never quit, never quit.”

– *President Bill Clinton*

Introduction

The lack of persistence and low completion rates of African American males in higher education continues to be a part of highly-debated conversation (Carey, 2016; Garibaldi, 2007; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Land et al., 2014; Roscoe, 2015). Despite the pessimistic outlook towards African American males in the venue of education, this study takes a more optimistic focus. The research took place at a private historically Black college and university (HBCU). HBCUs represents about 3% of all colleges and universities in the United States (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Nichols, 2004). The purpose of this study was to understand the complexity of eight participants’ collegiate experience by discovering factors associated with successful graduation. Research is needed for a more contemporary body of literature documenting how effective HBCUs are in successfully graduating African American males. Therefore, a qualitative phenomenological research design was used to investigate the lived experiences of eight African American male students regarding their persistence and resiliency at a private HBCU.

To gain a better understanding of each participants’ sphere of influences and factors that inspired persistence of African American male students, the study provided voice from their lived experiences. In addition, the eight participants in this study negated numerous stereotype

associated with African American male aged college students (Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Shorette II & Palmer, 2015). The metaphor for *Amazing Race* was used in the study. In the *Amazing Race* metaphor, the students partake a journey that takes four, five or six years before reaching their final destination to be a college graduate. In this academic race, the students encounter detours, roadblocks, pit-stops, and others move to fast-forward strategies in their postsecondary completion. Even though there are academic and social challenges that these men encountered, they demonstrated persistence and resiliency in their academic journey.

A deficiency exists in the scholarly literature surrounding persistence of African American male students attending historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Most of the literature touches on predominantly White institutions (PWIs). These African American male students are not in hiding, but are present in all higher education institutions. By focusing on the eight male students, the researcher tells a counter narrative that suggests African American males are not in such crisis in the HBCUs institutions.

The participants were given the opportunity through face-to-face interviews to tell their stories and provide factors that contributed to their persistence and resiliency at a private HBCU. Therefore, in this final chapter, the researcher will present a brief summary of the study. Interpretations of major findings and conclusions will follow. The last section of the chapter contains recommendations for further research and the implications for professional practice.

Summary of the Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was used to gain insight into the eight African American male students' collegial experiences at a private historical Black college and university (HBCU). Tinto's Student Integration model (1975, 1987, 1993) was the theoretical framework that guided this study. In addition, the theoretical framework was used to

explore participants' persistence and resiliency in their postsecondary journey. The focus on eight African American male students allowed the researcher to hone in on the strengths and challenges faced by this population. The investigation was driven by the following research questions:

1. How do African American male students overcome challenges they encounter in college?
2. To what do African American male students attribute their academic success?
3. To what extent did the educational experience at this private HBCU influence one's decision(s) to persistently enroll until graduation without dropping out?

The lack therefore of African American male students in higher education is an ongoing trend that continues to challenge educators and policymakers. The absence of educational preparation and academic rigor during high school continues to impact the African American male collegiate journey (Perry et al., 2016; Royster et al., 2015; Vega et al., 2015). The literature review confirms negative educational experiences for African American male students.

Additionally, this population is viewed in a deficit frame. As a result, this may influence African American male students' bad behaviors in academic and social engagement, especially during high school and college attainment (Bottiani et al., 2016; Farmer & Hope, 2015; Flowers III, 2015; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Hines et al., 2015; Latunde, & Clark-Louque, 2016; Roscoe, 2015). This research was accomplished using a qualitative phenomenological research design. The design allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the influences and factors that encourage persistence. As a result, it provided a voice from the lived perspective experiences of the eight African American male student participants. Additionally, the study provides all stakeholders (educators, parents, policymakers, and higher education institutions) with effective

information about what it takes to support African American male youths to be successful during their postsecondary educational endeavors.

A semi-structured, in-depth interview protocol was used to collect narrative data from eight African American male students at a private HBCU. The selection of the eight participants followed a purposeful sampling strategy. This was specifically designed to identify eight successful African American male students who were on the verge of completing a four-year degree. The process of coding permitted the researcher to identify three themes. The three themes are 1) Influential People; 2) In Face of Adversity, I Stay Strong; and 3) College Enriching Experiences. These three themes reflect the lived experiences and narratives of African American male students.

Influential People

Participants in the study were very clear in describing their persistence and resiliency during the academic journey. To the eight African American male students, they had positive relationship with their parents, English high school teachers, and faculty members. Former President Obama was viewed as a role model who inspired them for greater things to come. Each participant described, with examples, how the positive relationships had a direct impact on their academic success. A line of research suggests that any support with positive relationship play a role in a student's commitment to the goal of graduation (Asamsama et al., 2016; Brooks, 2015; Strom & Savage, 2014).

In the face of Adversity, I Stay Strong

To attain a college degree is significant for any race or ethnicity. It provides greater leverage related to quality of life (Vega et al., 2015; Washington, 2013). Despite all of the barriers, being underprepared, and identifying as a first-generation college student, the

participants were able to achieve academic persistence and resilience. It was their resilience that inspired hope and a desire to not quit. Therefore, resiliency provided strengths in all eight participants in the face of adversity.

College Enriching Experiences

There is an appreciation from eight African American male students to the HBCU for giving them an opportunity of pursuing a college degree. The participants in the study provided information about the support networks that have contributed to their postsecondary education success. Research has shown that African American students at HBCUs are educated in a family-like environment that promotes racial uplift, cultural nourishment and academic success (Palmer & Young, 2009; Shorette II & Palmer, 2015; Strayhorn, 2014).

Research Question # 1: How do African American male students overcome challenges they encounter in college?

The findings of the study are significant because they demonstrate that success for eight African American male students came from family, teachers, professors and a self-belief within themselves. Even during their success, participants encountered failure and trials either personally or academically. Regardless of these challenges, each participant overcame his personal and academic challenges with the support and encouragement from their sphere of influencers. The support came from family, faculty, high school English teachers and the effect of the Obama presidency. In addition, different scholars have noted the positive instrumental role in which students' families play in supporting their academic success (Carey, 2016). The motivation and support received enabled the participants to overcome both academic and social challenges while pursuing a four-year degree. Furthermore, an aura of self-confidence by the eight participants added positively in overcoming academic challenges. All eight participants

understood the benefits of higher education from an African American perspective. To them, the desire in obtaining a college degree was not only for personal gain (better lifestyle) but the yearning to improve the lives of their families and communities. Tinto's model (1975, 1987, 1993) emphasizes that social and academic integration are essential to student persistence. The eight African American male students had the drive and passion to persist with their education until degree completion. Hence, they were committed to complete their postsecondary education at the college. According to Tinto (1975, 1983, 1993), commitments are twofold; goal commitment and institutional commitment. Commitment to goals include educational plans, and educational expectations. Everyone wanted to complete a journey that lasted either four, five or six years in their educational pursuit. The findings from this study are consistent with the results done by Land et al., (2014). In the study conducted, participants were inspired to get enrolled in college for individual's goals advancement, and had a deep desire to ensure a better lifestyle for their families and ultimately afford to enjoy a better life for themselves (Land et al., 2014).

Research Question # 2: To what do African American male students attribute their academic success?

All eight participants expressed a deep relationship of support from their immediate families. However, the manner of academic support and influences varied from each participant, but nonetheless the outcome of persistence and resiliency remained the same. Besides positive motivation coming from their family members, others recognized academic success as the only means to break-out from the norms of poverty. According to Blackwell and Pinder (2014), a postsecondary education is considered one of the main paths leading to opportunity, social mobility, and economic progress in the United States of America. Each participant understood the opportunities a college degree brings forth to them. The opportunities include full-

employment and at the same time, removing a cycle of generational trends of continued academic deficiencies. A desire by the participants to prove “them” (society) wrong and achieve academic success awakened the eight African American male students in the study.

Continuously hearing of negative undertones linked with African American males motivated the participants to persist in their academic endeavors. To the eight participants, it was a sense of accomplishment in spite of barriers that started in high school. In literature, African American male populations are characterized by low achievement rates, alarming expulsion and suspension, and underrepresentation in rigorous or gifted programs (Bottiani et al., 2016; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Royster et al., 2015; Perry et al., 2016). The participants identified themselves as strong African American males debunking the stereotypes of not a college ready student. Therefore, participants demonstrated the right attitude to achieve success in the midst of facing adversity during their academic journey.

Research Question #3: To what extent did the educational experience at this private HBCU influence one’s decision(s) to persistently enroll until graduation without dropping out?

Throughout all the eight interviews, the participants expressed that this HBCU presented them with unlimited opportunities to succeed. The participants developed a personal attachment through a desire to continue with their degree aspirations because of the supportive college environment. In addition, the eight African American male students had the guidance and assistance they needed during critical times and non-critical periods while enrolled. Hence, the male students were connected to the fact that the HBCU had the convictions of providing educational opportunities to African Americans. The college provided support in both the academic and social environment which was important in imparting a feeling of inclusion in the participants. There was a 100% agreement by the participants that being around people with

similar characteristics made a huge difference in their persistence and resiliency towards degree completion. The eight African American male students' experiences at the HBCU made them comfortable in their own skin. In their own words, the participants felt "supported, welcomed, and understood by the college community".

Several researchers (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Flowers et al., 2015; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Museus et al., 2017; Tinto, 1988, 1993) have suggested that opportunities for direct interaction among students and faculty lead to increased levels of student involvement and engagement. These findings directly correlate with students' ability to integrate academically and socially into the college environment (Flowers et al., 2015; Simmons, 2013). The results validate that by attending an HBCU, African American male students have a positive feeling of belonging, a sense of prestige, and an attitude of self-belief. The statement is supported by the participants' viewpoint of the study. They expressed their gratitude of being largely taught by professors who look like them. These were their role models that demonstrated to them that dreams can be achieved.

Major Supporting Quotes from the Participants

Research examining African American male students' presence in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) is not extensive. Most of the extensive scholarly literature on African American male students focus on those attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs). The information expressed in the interviews indicated that participants felt at ease, psychologically and mentally by attending an HBCU. With such comments as, "I came out of my shell" and "I am Black and proud", the call for more research to be done on African American male students in HBCUs is strengthened. The participants' statements below are evidence of their lived experiences during the long educational journey.

Clayton: My overall experience here is great. Coming from a predominantly White high school and now at a HBCU, makes me appreciate my culture even more. Everyone is nice and I actually came out of my shell. My confidence is back. I am no longer trying to fit in.

DeVandre: My educational experiences have been up and down, but overall very interesting. I can say with 100% confidence that the college prepared me for the next chapter in my life. It has totally change my views about other African Americans. Now, I have surrounded myself with others who are on the same journey that I am traveling. We all want to succeed.

Tyree: I will not give up no matter what it is. I am lucky, this college is located in a rural community and with less distractions. I am very committed in completing my degree. The motto I live by each day is “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13.

Jamal: My professors have challenged me to do better in all my classes and I have no excuses not to perform better.

Trenton: My grandma is very proud of me because I will be the first grand kid to complete a degree.

Eldrick: Now I am a firm believer in high education. All you have to do is take time and focus.

Brendon: Most of the professors have high expectations for us. They did help me a lot. That is the reason why I am at HBCU. This college is for us.

Rashaad: I never gave up. I lost my father when I was 14 years old. It just gave me an extra push to honor him with a college degree.

The determination by the eight African American male students to complete their life-long dream of attaining a four-year degree was made possible through attending an HBCU. The participants expressed that, a combination of gaining confidence and a nurturing environment of the college made them persist in their academic goals. The eight participants' responses concluded that academic success is solely based on resiliency, and motivation. These attributes are self-instilled in the participants as they move towards graduating at a HBCU. All eight participants articulated their ambition to succeed in life and remove the negative stereotype associated within the African American communities.

Conclusion

Tinto's theoretical framework of students' academic and social integration was a solid foundation on which to base this study. Both academic and social integration influenced goal commitments to persistence for the eight African American male students. Five (63%) of the participants in the study were first-generation college students and had a level of under-preparedness for postsecondary education. A range of educational barriers existed in the form of taking remedial course work. One would intuitively think that academic integration would pose as a major challenge to the participants' college persistence. However, the students were seamlessly able to integrate into the academics. This is largely because of the mission statement of the college. The mission statement states that it is:

Committed to the principle of educational access, the College serves traditional students from diverse backgrounds who have expressed a desire and potential for learning in a Christian environment. The College, in fulfilling its basic purpose of providing liberal arts education...

This college mission statement aligns with results from the study. The eight participants echoed the benefits of an HBCU through their statement about educational opportunity and access. The academic influences from faculty on the participants serve as evidence of the college's mission and philosophy that enables students to persist. The professors made an impact on the eight African American male students' academic aspirations and a commitment to successfully persist towards their degrees. In addition, professors provided the dedication necessary for developing strong ambitious learners who were not quitters. The eight participants felt the immersion of being indoctrinated with the right ideals of higher education. HBCUs offer greater exposure to African American role models whom the eight male students identify through student-faculty interactions (Brooks et al., 2016; Palmer et al., 2011). Perhaps the most surprising voice from the participants before enrolling at this college was their lack of self-worth and confidence of being an African American in education. From the study, the participants were now proud and felt they could contribute their talents to the country after graduating. As someone said, "education can free you from mental slavery" (anonymous). Now they were determined to thrive and achieve their educational dreams. Thus for HBCUs, they act as agents of social and academic change in the lives of many African American men.

The culture and climate for HBCUs is geared towards African Americans (Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Palmer & Young, 2009). These institutions offer a campus philosophy that is rich in cultural values and is evident in the engagement and support programs (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). In the study, the nurturing environment of this college eliminated academics difficulties of the eight African American male participants. Students need to feel at home while in school rather than like a guests in someone else's house (Stephens et al., 2015). This idea implies that students need to feel at home in college. The experience of feeling at home provides a sense of

being included, welcomed, and recognized within the college community (Stephens et al., 2015). In this case, the participants felt at home. On the other hand, many African American men feel alienated, and misunderstood in the realms of higher education (Cantey et al., 2013; Farmer & Hope, 2015; Flowers III, 2015; Patterson et al., 2013). As a result, a sense of cultural disconnection with the college or university is visibly noticed. Contrary, in this study, the college promoted personal growth and academic success for the participants. Nonetheless, statistics indicates the plight of African American men having difficulties graduating from postsecondary education (Farmer & Hope, 2015; Paterson et al., 2013; Roscoe, 2015). This study provided reasons as to why the eight participants are persisting at a HBCU. These factors are important for all education stakeholders in understanding what it takes for African American men to be successful in their education endeavors. Such factors include:

1. Influences of family and other influential individuals
2. Self-motivation
3. Personal relation with faculty and staff
4. A welcoming and caring environment
5. High expectations from family, faculty and staff, and themselves.

As mentioned in the study, the eight African American male students were aware of societal perceptions of their limited hopes for academic success. Some participants acknowledged this phenomenon. Perhaps, the generalization from external expectations served as an internal source of strength to persevere in their amazing academic journey. Here the intent from the African American male students was to “prove the world wrong”. The success stories of the eight African American male students presented in the study remain fairly unnoticeable or only discussed as a deviation from the norm. The experience of success shows the importance of

HBCUs in the higher education landscape. The eight participants emphasized that the college (HBCU) provided them a sense of racial pride as well as giving them the opportunity to excel when other opportunities were not available to them. For the African American male students, obtaining a college degree is central to “Who they are,” “who they hope to become,” and “how it changes the future they envision themselves in.”

A Researcher’s Reflection

As a researcher who identifies himself as an African American male, he was positioned with a unique perspective. The face-to-face interviews with each participant instigated a personal connection that can only be attributed to his race. The researcher was amazed by the strong-will, resilience, motivation, and unwavering dedication the participants had to their educational goals. Each participant expressed their sentiments at the end of the interview to the researcher with a simple word, “we are proud of you.”

Recommendations for Further Research

The qualitative phenomenological study was an investigation of eight African American male students attending a private HBCU in the Coastal Plains. This research was intended to provide the lived experiences from participants’ academic and social integration. Furthermore, the researcher wanted to understand internal and external motivations by African American male students in their persistence toward a college degree. The positive portrayal of African American men attending HBCUs in higher education literature is limited. Therefore, there is a need for scholars to expand research on this group especially those matriculating in HBCUs. These will offer areas of solutions and success for African American male students instead of academic failures. The environmental settings of HBCUs can be the difference maker between a student persisting or dropping-out of college. As noted from the study, participants reflected on the

influences of faculty members who made a difference in their academic success. In addition, from hearing the voices of African American male students, the participants received mutual respect from their professors. From the study, the HBCU professors showed them respect and expressed interest in the lives of the participants.

Not all African American men attend HBCUs, however, these institutions of higher education graduate the highest number of African American males. In this instance, there are several opportunities where researchers can expand and build the knowledge gained from the results of this study. Firstly, the study did not focus on the high-achievers of African American male students. A majority of the participants in the study were first-generation college students and from low socioeconomic status. The literature is inundated with studies of high-achieving African American males either attending HBCUs or PWIs. Therefore, the researcher recommends future research to focus mostly on first-generation, lower income students attending HBCUs.

From what can be understood from this study, this HBCU is recognized as an institution that provides a powerful and safe environment for the African American male population. In terms of further investigation, there is a need to look at the strong relationships between student-faculty interactions across different types of HBCUs. However, the limitation with this phenomenological study was its restriction to eight African American male students attending a small private HBCU. Because of its narrow study, the investigation results cannot be generalized for all African American male students studying at different HBCUs. Therefore, a wider examination of student-faculty interaction across all HBCUs and their institutional characteristics such as size and type might yield different outcomes. These studies can reveal either positive or negative patterns between student-faculty interactions. Hence, a future research

might yield positive traits in the structure within HBCUs that makes African American male students to persist in their educational goals.

HBCUs continue to graduate a large number of African American male students. However, not all African American men are able to attend either HBCUs or PWIs due to rising cost of tuition and fees. The room for research regarding this population is very robust. Two year colleges are areas of need for further research in understanding African American males' college experiences. These colleges, also referred to as community colleges, offer another opportunity for African American male students. There is an increasing number of African Americans going straight to community colleges after high school because of their proximity to home and being affordable. Therefore, duplicating this study in these settings with similar demographic African American male students, will determine if similar themes will develop. As a result, the researcher will assess whether the findings could be generalized across all African American males.

This study expands the knowledge of how African American male students' success is facilitated in HBCUs. The results from these studies could yield information which can be utilized in assisting colleges and universities to plan and develop environments that are conducive to African American male students' academic success.

Implication for the “Model” of Persistence Developed by the Author

Within the realm of higher education, the academic persistence and completion rates of African American males is still low when compared with other races (Farmer & Hope, 2015; Flowers III, 2015; Roscoe, 2015). A small segment of this population is advancing and persisting towards their postsecondary endeavors. There is no straight answer to articulate why there is a low interest in African American male students not persisting in higher education.

Numerous models have been advanced to explain the college persistence process. The most notable framework is Tinto's student integration model. In Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) findings, he focused on three factors that can lead a student's ability to successfully remain in college. These were (1) separation from their past communities, (2) transition from the high school environment to college life, and (3) integrate into the academic and social subsystems of their campus. Therefore, a successful integration to remain or persist in college is vital for African American male students in either PWIs or HBCUS.

The trajectories of African American males in their educational pursuit vary per individual student. In this case, the author produced a flow chart of a visual representation of stages taken by African American male students' academic persistence (Figure 4). Despite their low proportion of obtaining postsecondary degrees, some students are able to complete their academic journeys in four, five or six years. The road towards degree accomplishment is not always a straight path for any student. There are going to be detours, roadblocks, pit-stops, and some students are able to fast-forward towards degree accomplishments. The following represent the characterization of the stages student mostly likely route in their academic persistence.

Detours: The transition from high school to college can be a nerve wrecking experience for any student, especially first-generation students. A detour is an obstacle to students' academic goals. The first academic year will mostly determine the will of the student to progress in his/her postsecondary journey. In this phase, either positively or negatively, a detour can set the stage by providing the experiences and skills that define future student's academic life. In addition, the probability of a student starting to question their ability to succeed academically

comes into their minds. Failing one or two classes and even taking remedial courses can subject students to start questioning their own intelligence and the purpose of higher education.

Roadblocks: During ones' academic journey, unexpected events can happen that can derail a student plan to graduation. This events can include retaking a class, college adjustments, and lack of financial aid support. Sometimes, there is an initial fear of taking a commitment in achieving ones' educational goals that can prove intimidating. Removing the emotional roadblocks is needed through the support of family and college resources. Therefore, success depends on the student ability to overcome the roadblocks in front of them.

Pit-stops: The rejuvenation of the mind is needed after two long grueling semesters (fall and spring) for many students. During summer break, students are re-acquainted with their loved ones and strategize for the following semester. The most difficulty decisions are made during this period to either continue or take a break from the rigors of college life.

Fast forward: There are students who are inspired to complete their degree programs in a short period of time of three years instead of four or six years. These scholars are purely motivated to complete their studies faster than any other traditional students and move on to the next challenge. In order to fast forward, these students take on course overloads and enroll in summer classes.

The "model" of academic persistence promoted by the author can be a blueprint for institutions of higher education to acknowledge and be beware of the struggles students go through in their college life. By instituting safeguards, the path for degree completion could be less daunting for many students. Detours, roadblocks, and pit-stops can cause students to give up. This can be a defining moment in life. Therefore, institutions of higher education can lay the groundwork for smoother postsecondary journey which can lead to academic persistence.

Implications for Professional Practice

The study's findings provide several implications for all institutions of higher education. The eight African American male students discussed how this HBCU provided them an opportunity for postsecondary education when other higher education doors were closed. Not all eight participants identified themselves as high achievers during high school. Their transition to postsecondary education was not smooth. The participants encountered barriers and challenges which they were able to overcome as they move towards degree completion. The study results show that it takes a lot of support for any individual student to overcome academic and social barriers. Hence, HBCUs unique positions of admitting students who might otherwise not be accepted in other institutions is a true testament of its mission of accepting any student. The eight African American male students were able to academically achieve good grades every semester. Their persistence indicates that HBCU delivers a supportive environment that fostered a sense of academic achievement and racial pride.

Getting to know success stories of how African American male students achieve their educational dreams is not that complicated. However, their success stories are not well publicized. The role of the media portraying African American men skews negatively the way this population is viewed. Consequently, it does not strengthen the African American males' plight. Starting from PreK-12, the population is viewed in a doom and gloom way. However, the eight participants in the study all expressed the importance of an education. If they are portrayed in a positive way, it might likely remove the education stereotype from the minds of educators. It is a must for African American male students to be seen in a positive manner. As the eight participants realize the need of an education, they truly embrace the significance of achieving a college degree. The sooner African American male students are committed to and believes in

education, the easier and faster their academic success story starts. The participants' tales of their success are significant because their achievements need to be visible in the literature.

The nurturing environment of the HBCU eliminated the doubts in the minds of eight African male students that they can actually succeed. The participants were able to integrate academically and socially into the college environment. The culture and climate of an institution can make or break students and determine whether they will persist. In this study, the African American male students felt loved, appreciated, and experienced a sense of cultural connection within the college. There is a need to understand African American male college populations in order to improve efforts that will expand their academic success. Institutions that are willing to listen, being sensitive to their needs, and eager to develop caring and nurturing relationships will be able to attract more African American men on their campuses. The practitioners of higher education should take note of the positive environmental practices seen at HBCUs. These practices and solutions can provide great resources concerning African American men's educational experiences in all institutions of higher education. The potential benefits of understanding African American male students in either HBCUs or PWIs is fundamentally great for the institutions. It will assist in retaining and successfully graduating African American male population. In addition, institutions should be committed to take the lead in promoting institutional connectedness, academic and social integration which results in college satisfaction. However, African American male students should also be held accountable for their college experience, performance, achievement and institutional integration.

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Appendix A: Approval Letter from [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

November 3, 2015

Northwest Nazarene University
Attention: HRRC Committee
Helstrom Business Center 1st floor
623 S. University Boulevard
Nampa, ID 83686

RE: Research Proposal Site Access for Mr. Luwis A. Mhlanga

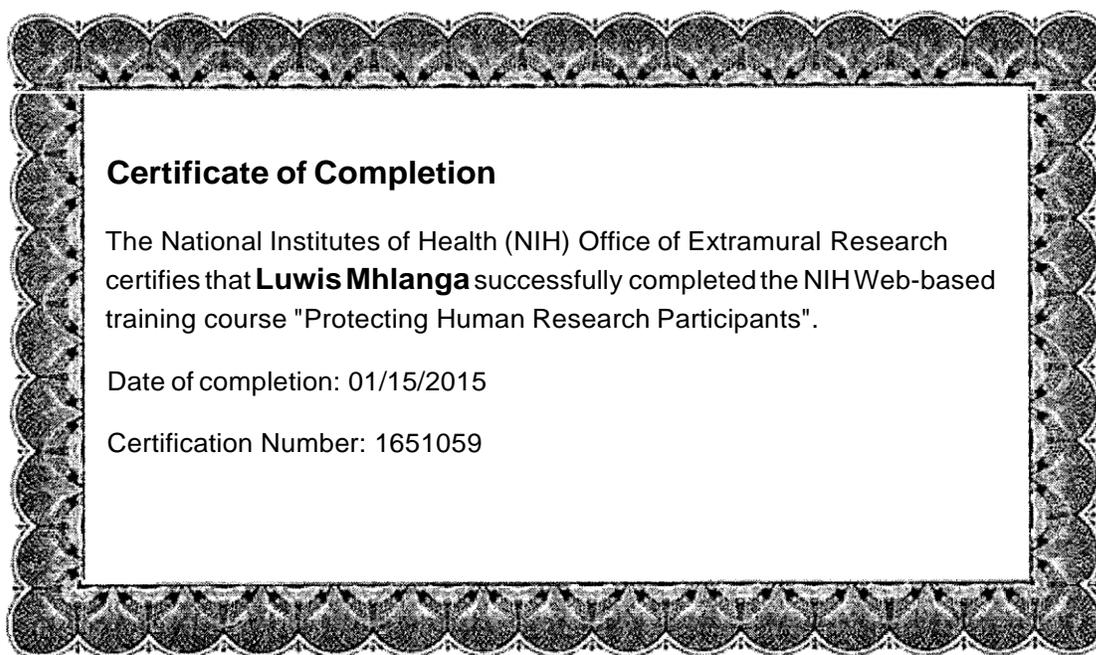
Dear HRRC Members:

This letter is to inform the HRCC that Administration at [REDACTED] has reviewed the proposed dissertation research plan including subjects, intervention, assessment procedures, proposed data and collection procedures, data analysis, and purpose of the study. Mr. Mhlanga has permission to conduct his research at the college and with students and staff of [REDACTED]. The authorization dates for this research are July 2016 to April 2017.

Respectfully,

[REDACTED]
Dean of Business and Technology

Appendix B: NIH Research Certificate



Appendix C: Qualitative Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Luwis A. Mhlanga, M.S., and M.Ed., a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at Northwest Nazarene University is conducting a research study related to the challenges and strengths encountered by African American males focusing on their persistence and resilience through graduation. The use of metaphor of *Amazing Race* will guide the study. I hope to discover “common” elements that makes African American males succeed in college despite facing difficulty circumstance during their educational journey

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a healthy volunteer, over the age of 18.

B. PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

1. You will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form, volunteering to participate in the study.
2. You will answer a set of interview questions and engaged in a discussion with the investigator. This discussion will be audio taped for accuracy purposes, and is expected to last approximately 120 minutes. Your response(s) will help to provide and give encouragement to other African American males who might be facing the same issues that you went through.
3. There are several questions prepared for this study. I may also ask additional questions for clarification such as, “can you expand on that issue?” or “how did it make you feel?” If you are uncomfortable with any questions I ask, please let me know immediately and I will move to the next question. You may choose to end the interview at any time.
4. You will be asked to reply to an email at the conclusion of the study asking you to confirm the data that was gathered during the research process.

These procedures will be completed at campus in one of the private study rooms in the library or at a location mutually decided upon by the participant and principal investigator and will take a total of about 120 minutes.

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

1. Some of the discussion questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

Appendix C

Qualitative Informed Consent (continued)

2. For this research project, the researchers are requesting demographic information. The researchers will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may leave them blank.
3. Confidentiality: Participation in research may involve a loss of privacy; however, your records will be handled as confidentially as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. All data from notes, audio tapes, and disks will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the Department and the key to the cabinet will be kept in a separate location. In compliance with the Federalwide Assurance Code, data from this study will be kept for three years, after which all data from the study will be destroyed (45 CFR 46.117).
4. Only the primary researcher and the research supervisor will be privy to data from this study. As researchers, both parties are bound to keep data as secure and confidential as possible.

D. BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information you provide may help educators and other minority students to better understand what it takes to complete a baccalaureate degree at an HBCU.

E. PAYMENTS

There are no payments for participating in this study.

F. QUESTIONS

If you have questions or concerns about participating in this study, you should first talk with the researcher. Luwis A. Mhlanga can be contacted via email at lmhlanga@nnu.edu, via telephone at 940-765-5212. If for some reason you do not wish to do this, you may contact Dr. Bethani Studebaker, Doctoral Committee Chair at Northwest Nazarene University, via email at bstudebaker@nnu.edu, via telephone at 208-467-8802, or by writing: 623 university Drive, Nampa, Idaho, 83686.

G. CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as a student at your College.

Appendix C**Qualitative Informed Consent (continued)**

I give my consent to participate in this study:

Signature of Study Participant

Date

I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be audio taped in this study:

Signature of Study Participant

Date

I give my consent for direct quotes to be used in this study:

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

**THE NORTHWEST NAZARENE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH REVIEW COMMITTEE
HAS REVIEWED THIS PROJECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN
RESEARCH.**

Appendix D: Email Recruitment

Date

Dear Participant

My name is Luwis Mhlanga and I am a doctoral student from Northwest Nazarene University. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation titled “The Amazing Race” – Success Through Persistence and Resilience: A Phenomenological Study on the Lived Experiences of African American Males at a Private Historically Black College and University.” The purpose of this email is to solicit your support and participation.

The study will allow me to share fundamental knowledge about your accomplishment and the lived experiences that contributed to your success. The study will capture the voices of eight African American male students who overcame barriers and persisted through college towards graduation. I would like to interview you as it relates to the challenges that you encountered in your educational journey and how you manage to persist. Participation in the interviews will take approximately 45-60 minutes. Findings of the study will be shared with you upon completion of the study. Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without penalty.

The information from the interviews will be audio recorded, but will remain completely anonymous and your answered will not connect to you in any way. The data will be analyzed by me (Luwis Mhlanga). Unfortunately, no direct compensation for your time. Your input is extremely valuable and your participation would be greatly appreciated.

By participating in this study, there are no known risks. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

To participate in the research, please respond to the email at lmhlanga@nnu.edu and provide the best available time for the interview. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Luwis A. Mhlanga
Doctoral Student
Northwest Nazarene University
lmhlanga@nnu.edu
940-765-5212

Appendix E: Verbatim Instructions

Hi _____!

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.

Semi-Structured, Audio-Recorded Interviews

A semi-structured, audio-recorded interview will be conducted with each participant. These procedures will be completed at a public locations mutually decided upon by the participant and the investigator and will take a total of about 45-60 minutes.

I would like to conduct the interview within the next month (October). This process is completely voluntary and you can select to suspend your involvement at any time. You can select to answer questions that are of comfort to you and not obligated to answer all of the questions. Please, find the attached interview questions.

If you any questions, please do not hesitate to call me or contact me via email. I look forward to our interview and learning about your college experiences.

Thank you for your participation.

Luwis Mhlanga
Doctoral Student
Northwest Nazarene University
lmhlanga@nnu.edu
940-765-5212

Appendix F: Interview Questions

1. What is your name (pseudonyms will be used). You may want to answer the questions
2. Can you briefly discuss your upbringing?
3. How was your schooling experiences like before college?
4. What are your schooling experiences now?
5. What helped mold you commitment to stay in college?
6. What barriers or challenges you encountered in college?
7. What barriers or challenges you encountered concerning your academic, social, and personal environments regarding your persistence towards graduations?
8. Where there any barriers or challenges that you faced that did not facilitate a true learning environment at this college?
9. What experiences contributed to persistence as a successful African American man in this college environment?
10. Where you involved in any type of activities in college?
11. Can you identify any role models or someone who just encouraged you throughout your educational journey?
12. Where they any high expectation from your professors?
13. Did you had any positive/negative experiences that you faced while pursuing your degree?
 - a. How did you overcome barriers in obtaining your degree if any (e.g., from family, friends, and college as a whole)?
14. Do you believe the opinions of society at large have affected how African American men are viewed
15. What type of advice can you give to African American men of your age?
16. Are there any comments or observations about African American male students in higher education that you would like to share>

Appendix G: Member Checking Email

Date

Dear _____!

I hope that this email finds you in good health and spirit. Thank you for your participation in the study entitled “*The Amazing Race*” – *Success through Persistence and Resilience: A Phenomenological Study on the Lived Experiences of African American Males at a Private Historically Black College and University*. I wanted to inform you of the themes that resulted from the interviews of the study that you were part of (see below). Please let me know if these accurately depicted our interview dialogue. If you have any suggestions, modifications, or comments, please let me know by Tuesday, February 28, 2017.

The purpose of this study was to give an inclusive view of the experiences associated with the struggles linked to the academic life of African American male post-secondary students

The guiding research questions in this study were

1. How do African American male students overcome challenges they encounter in college?
2. To what do African American male students attribute their academic success?
3. To what extent did the educational experience at this private HBCU influence one’s decision(s) to persistently enroll until graduation without dropping out?

The themes that emerged from the interviews that you participated in.

| Themes | Categories |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Influential People: | Family, Faculty, the Obama Effect, High School English Teachers |
| In Face of Adversity, I Stay Strong | Raised in Single Parent Household, Not College ready Student |
| College Enriching Experiences | Supportive College Environment, Sense of Belonging, Mentors |

If these themes do not reflect your experience or you would like to comment further, please respond to this email or contact me at the number below. Thank you again for participating in dissertation study. It would not have been possible without you.

Luwis Mhlanga
 Doctoral Student
 Northwest Nazarene University
lmhlanga@nnu.edu

Appendix H

University of Chicago Press

Permissions Department
1427 East 60th Street
Chicago, IL 60637
Phone: 773-702-6096 / Fax: 773-702-9756

Permission Grant

Luwis A Mhlanga
3721 Regency Ct
Ft Worth, TX 76137

Date: March 13, 2017
Grant Number: 110121
Request Date: 03/04/2017
Reference Number: 00495310601

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