

Pathways to Success at a Historically Black College and University: An Examination of
the Experiences of First Generation African American Male Students

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades First Generation African American (FGAA) males have been underrepresented in America's colleges and universities. Nearly 67% of those enrolled, specifically at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), have failed to obtain a 4-year degree. Therefore, I utilized a phenomenological design with Astin, Spady, Tinto, and Bean as the theoretical frameworks. I interviewed six FGAA male students utilizing a series of three-interviews to understand their experiences at an HBCU (Seidman, 2006). In addition, I reviewed institutional documents such as the student code of conduct manual, campus activity bi-laws, and student transcripts, to compare the data obtained through the interviews. Data analysis utilizing memos, categorizing, connecting strategies, document analysis, and constant comparative method produced three themes: community and family influences on educational goals; responding productively to racism; and First Generation (FG) students reinventing themselves. The findings suggest FGAA male students are more likely to be successful because of resilience and persistence which helps them break down barriers. The findings also suggest although FGAA male students may start college at a disadvantage, special characteristics of persistence and resilience might benefit all African American (AA) male students.

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Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you,
plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving husband, Quhannah, and my two beautiful (a.k.a “divas”) daughters Tatyanna and Ariyanna who experienced this journey with me. During this process, they showed me unconditional love and strength that pushed me beyond my own expectations. They truly brought out the best in me and I will be forever grateful. This would not have been possible without each of you. I love you guys to the moon and back. ---- “Let the beauty of what you love be what you do” (Rumi).

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Over the past few decades, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have experienced sharp declines in African American (AA) male students' retention and graduation rates (Bonner, 2010). Flowers (2004) attributed the decline in retention and graduation rates to the lack of programs and services to assist AA male students to transition into college. Adams (2011) contended degree attainment levels are significantly lower for AA males in college as opposed to their peers. During Fall 2014, the University System of Georgia reported retention rates of AA male students at Fort Valley State University (40.2%), Albany State University (51.7%), and Savannah State University (40.1%). Comparatively, AA female students' retention rates at Fort Valley State University (61.9%), Albany State University (64.6%), and Savannah State University (42.4%) were higher (USG by the Numbers, 2017). Bonner (2010) reported AA males are underprepared for the rigor and challenges faced in college.

For the past decade, I have had the opportunity to teach and mentor several AA male students on campus at a HBCU. This passion to educate and mentor young AA male students resonated within me early in my career in higher education. Since the retention rate of First Generation African American (FGAA) male students has declined at HBCUs, more attention needs to be focused on identifying why these students are

leaving college prior to obtaining their degrees. Literature by Bosco (2012) and Ray, Hilton, Wood, and Hicks (2016) revealed little progress has been made in an effort to improve retention and graduation rates for AA in college. This is particularly true for AA males, for whom retention and graduation rates are troublesome at HBCUs (Byrne, 2006).

On average, HBCUs in southeast Georgia have a 33% AA male student retention rate (USG by the Numbers, 2017). In contrast, the average retention rate for AA males attending non-HBCUs in southeast Georgia was approximately 50% (USG by the Numbers, 2017). This would include universities such as Armstrong State University, Georgia College and State University, and Columbus State University. Subsequently, there exists a need for a solution to the retention issues AA males' face in higher education. Bosco (2012) emphasized higher education institutions should continuously identify and implement strategies for engaging and retaining AA male students, particularly those categorized FG.

Often AA male students are faced with seemingly overwhelming challenges while pursuing their college degree (Bosco, 2012; Wright, 2016). According to Fleming (2012), AA male students, unlike other racial groups, encounter a higher level of negative obstacles and inequalities in the college environment. For the most part, AA males are plagued with issues that stem from academic, socioeconomic, and cultural factors that hinder their retention and persistence in college (Fleming, 2012). For example, AA males are at risk for being: a) underprepared academically, b) First Generation (FG), and c) subjected to crime and violence while pursuing a college education (Harper, 2012). As

a member of senior leadership at a HBCU, I am intrigued by the circumstances contributing to the low retention and graduation rates of FGAA male students.

With FGAA males displaying some of the lowest retention rates at HBCUs, it is important for educators to investigate how some of them successfully navigate the university environment (Adams, 2011). Most colleges and universities are seeking to understand why some AA male students drop out while others continue with their college studies (Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2013). Problematically, limited theoretical and practical studies have been conducted on FGAA male retention and persistence (Byrne, 2006). The need to address the retention issues of FGAA male students at HBCUs is pertinent to increasing retention and graduation rates for all college students, particularly AA male students (Ishitani, 2016). Demski (2011) found educational institutions fail to address the issue of retention often leads to life changing consequences for the AA male.

Statement of the Problem

Disproportionate FGAA male students' retention and graduation rates present a challenge to the American higher education system and society. This is an issue that impacts their lifetime earning potential and their ability to address the economic and global challenges that threaten America's future. Over the past two decades FGAA males have been underrepresented in America's colleges and universities. Nearly 67% of those enrolled, specifically at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), have failed to obtain a 4-year degree.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of FGAA male students concerning the practices employed that influenced their academic and social progression at an identified HBCU to obtain their 4-year degree.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What practices employed by FGAA male students at an identified HBCU to obtain their 4-year degrees proved to be successful and which practices were least successful?

RQ2: Which institutional policies and programs proved to be most supportive or least supportive to FGAA male students at an identified HBCU while obtaining their 4-year degree?

Significance of the Study

Low retention and graduation rates of FGAA male students at colleges and universities have been a major concern for leaders in higher education. For many FGAA male students, this has a negative influence on their social and academic progress in college. Over the past two decades institutional leaders have strived to identify the challenges that prohibit FGAA male student's academic and social achievement and implement strategies to improve retention and graduation rates. This study explored practices employed by FGAA male students attending an identified HBCU.

It is expected the results of the study may assist with counteracting the decline in AA male student's retention and graduation rates. In addition, the findings of the study may support federal, state, and local institutional policymakers in their effort to create

and shape policies to increase the number of FGAA male students that enroll, persist and graduate from college. Lastly, by learning the practices and focusing on the lived experiences of FGAA male students, college administrators can create programs and services to inspire retention and graduation; therefore, creating fair and equal educational opportunities and narrowing the achievement gaps often faced by FGAA male students. This will also benefit prospective AA male students seeking to obtain their degree from an HBCU.

Beyond the level of higher education, the data from this study may be used by state and federal agencies to develop policies and programs geared towards increasing college retention of FGAA males in post-secondary education. In addition, mentoring programs may be created in high schools and higher education institutions to provide opportunity and encouragement for AA males. Finally, the results of this study may potentially enhance the body of literature about the lived experiences and practices employed by FGAA males attending HBCUs. Most of the researched literature in Chapter 2 focuses on AA and FGAA male students in higher education.

Theoretical Framework

Significant theory models have been designed to clarify and address the issue of college student retention and persistence. For this study, theory models examined included the groundworks of Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory, Bean's (1980) Student Attrition Model, Spady's (1971) Student Dropout Model and Tinto's (1975, 1993) Student Integration and Departure Models respectively. A cooperative effort was established to draw conclusions about FGAA male students; therefore, the conceptual aspects of each model are shown to be similar. First, Astin's model was used to depict

how students develop and grow during their collegiate experience. Next, Bean’s model was used to explain the various reasons why students leave college (e.g., background characteristics, socioeconomic status, peer influence, etc.). Spady’s and Tinto’s models proposed student success is influenced by social and academic integration within the college environment. Each of the noted theorists has identified many variables that influence student retention and persistence in their works. These variables have been found to have a direct impact on student’s institutional commitment and desire to graduate; subsequently, these variables greatly influence the retention and graduation opportunities for FGAA male students (York, 1999).

A number of theory models have been developed to explain student retention and persistence in higher education. Most of the models researched illustrate the issues and processes associated with student retention. The review of literature for this study focused on past and current practices associated with retention and persistence.

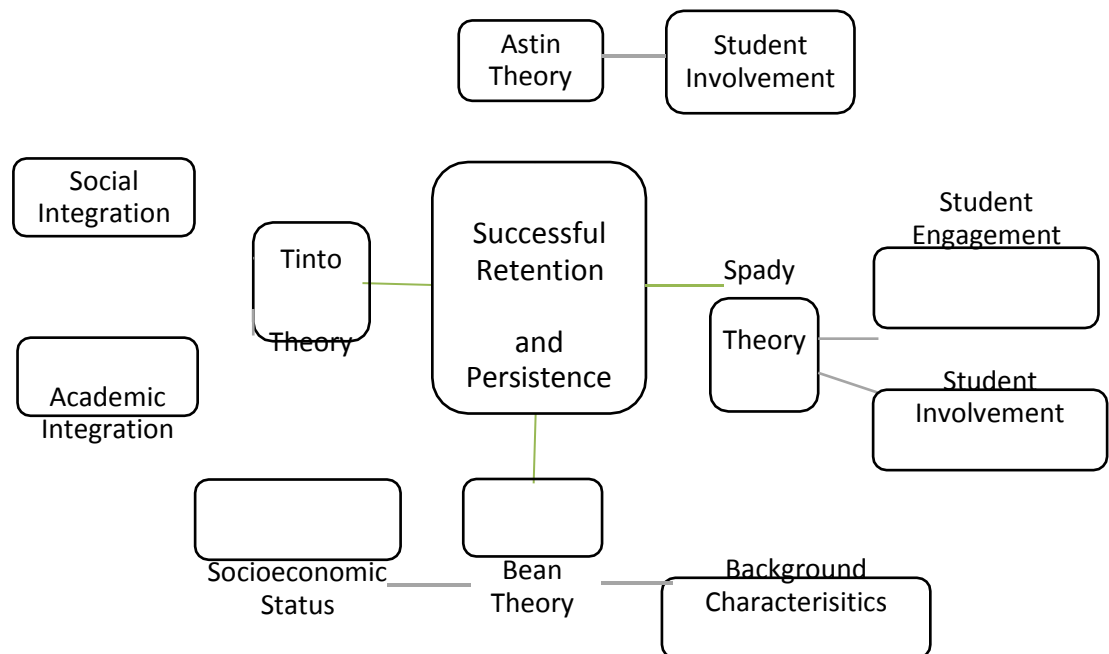


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework shown in Figure 1 provides a lens to help understand the problem associated with student retention and persistence. In the model, the nucleus (center) is the desired outcome which is the successful retention and persistence of FGAA male students attending HBCUs. Surrounding the nucleus are the theorists who have substantially contributed to the field of student retention and persistence. Branching from the theorist modules are the core components (variables) of their theories. These conditions impact the theories that ultimately affect a student's decision to stay or leave college. A detailed description of the theory models used in this study are presented in Chapter 2.

Methodology

Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological research design was used to examine participants' experiences and generate analytical themes based on their shared experiences. The goal of this research was to explore the lived experiences and practices employed by FGAA male students attending an identified HBCU to obtain their 4-year degree. Participants for the study were required to meet the pre-set criteria to participate in this study. Three sources were used to collect data: 1) interviews, 2) document review, and 3) policy reviews. The data collected was systematically analyzed and the results presented in a report.

Limitations

Several limitations may have constrained this study. First, based on the set criteria for the study, the participants were purposefully selected (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2013). Creswell and Maxwell recommend purposeful sampling based on the nature of the case and the phenomenon of interest. Based on the same criteria, the study

was limited to FGAA male students only. Hence, this study did not include other ethnic minority genders. In addition, this study was limited to an identified HBCU in one state. A HBCU in the southeastern Georgia was the set location for the research study. Some of the data collected was self-reported. The participants were expected to be open and honest with their responses. The examination of the phenomena – which refers to the lived experiences and practices employed by FGAA males at a HBCU – at a discrete point in time further limited this study. The opportunity to extend this study over a longer period may be beneficial since persistence to graduation is a long and evolutionary process (Tinto, 1993).

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were utilized in this study:

African American. The term African American represents any person of African heritage who has American citizenship.

African American Male. The term African American male describes any male born in North America whose ancestry can be traced to Africa and has American citizenship.

Educational Attainment. The term educational attainment refers to the highest level of education an individual has completed (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

First-generation. The term first generation refers to a student whose parent(s) never attended college or students whom neither parent(s) attained a baccalaureate degree (Ward & Siegel, 2012).

Gender. The term gender represents the distinction in sex whether male or female.

Graduation rate. The term graduation rate refers to the percentage of students within a group who graduate from an institution within a given time frame.

Historically Black College and University (HBCU). A HBCU is a postsecondary institution of higher education that existed before 1964 with a historic and contemporary mission of educating African Americans.

Persistence. The term persistence means a desire and action by a student to start and complete a bachelor's degree (Seidman, 2005).

Race. The term race describes a student's racial identity as African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, or other.

Readmit. The term readmit refers to an undergraduate applicant that has previously attended the university to which he or she is applying.

Retention. The term retention means the ability of an institution to retain a student from admission to graduation (Seidman, 2005).

Retention rate. The term retention rate refers to the percentage of an institutions first-time, first-year undergraduate students who continue at the institution the following year.

Social integration. The term social integration refers to students who have embraced and adapted to the social opportunities of college life (Tinto, 1975).

Stopout. The term stopout describes student who leave college, then re-enroll.

Student classification. The term student classification identifies a student's current level of educational status such as, freshmen (fewer than 30 completed credit hours), sophomore (31-60 completed credit hours), junior (61-90 completed credit hours), or senior (91 or more completed credit hours or more).

Student success. The term student success means achievement of a student's educational goal (Kim & Conrad, 2006).

Summary

Colleges and universities across the country work diligently to increase their enrollment; however, FGAA male students are severely underrepresented in higher education (Gallien & Peterson, 2005; Harper, 2012). Even though the number of FGAA males enrolling in college has increased, they still graduate at a rate drastically lower than other gender and racial groups (McDonough & Fann, 2007; O'Keeffe, 2013; Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Institutional leaders at HBCUs are faced with the unique challenge of providing practical and innovative solutions in regards to FGAA male retention and persistence. Theorists such as Tinto (1975) and Spady (1971) believed student retention and persistence correlate to the student's ability to socially and academically assimilate into the collegiate environment. First-hand knowledge is an important aspect associated with this study. Understanding the practices employed by FGAA male students begins with exploring their personal perceptions and experiences.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The subject of college student retention and persistence has been a popular issue facing institutions of higher learning for decades (Johnson, 2000). This chapter discusses related literature in regards to student retention and persistence in higher education. For example, literature was reviewed on AA male topics such as: a) AA males attending predominately white institutions (Wright, 2016), b) FG students (Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Ishitani, 2016; Ward & Siegel, 2012), and c) AA males in higher education (Fernandez, Davis, & Jenkins 2017; Garibaldi, 2017; O’Keeffe, 2013). An in-depth review of foundational theory and models assisted with explaining how student retention and persistence impacts AA and FG college students. The chapter also contains an historic overview and discussions of theory models influencing student retention and persistence.

I sought to learn about FGAA male student retention by initially searching online. Multiple search engines were used to search for relevant literature. This included books, journal articles, online databases (e.g., GALILEO and JSTOR) and other literary sources. Searching terms such as “first generation and African American male students,” and “student retention and Historically Black Colleges and Universities” was essential for finding literature associated with the research topic. This review of literature on student retention is meant to provide deep understanding of this topic and show the gap in the

literature for future research. In addition, it provides conceptual and theoretical grounding that guided the study as well.

Historical Overview

Early studies on undergraduate student retention started in the 1930s (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014). John McNeely conducted a qualitative study of 60 institutions of higher learning to determine if demographics and social engagement play a role in student departure (Demski, 2011). Two research questions guided this study: (1) how do demographics and social engagement impact student retention, and (2) how do demographics and social engagement impact student persistence? The purpose of the study was to determine if both factors contributed to and played an important role in retention and persistence. McNeely found both demographics and social engagement impacted retention and persistence (Demski, 2011).

McNeely's study is considered the first of many studies that arose on student retention in higher education in the United States (Demski, 2011). Berger and Lyon (2005) defined student retention as "an institution's ability to retain a student from admission to graduation" (p. 4). Although gaining access to college was important, many of the studies during this period focused on why students failed to graduate –often termed "student mortality" (Berger & Lyon, 2005). McDonough and Fann (2007) found student mortality to be common amongst AA males. Based on the authors' perspective, AA male college students experience a large amount of ethnic, racial, and gender disparity in the pursuit of higher education.

During the 1950s and 1960s, institutions of higher learning sought and catered to a select population of students (Berger & Lyon, 2005). This population consisted of

upper class white males and females. Because of the small number of students meeting these criteria, Demski (2011) observed a trend whereby degree completion was rare and institutional survival was priority. Emerging interest in student retention led to changes in the way institutions focused on postsecondary education and degree attainment. This change prompted greater access to higher education for middle and low-income students. In 1965, the Higher Education Act was passed to increase access to higher education for a larger population (McDonough & Fann, 2007), and provided students with financial support to enroll in colleges and universities. Additionally, the Higher Education Act created on campus support services to help students succeed academically.

In spite of the Higher Education Act of 1965, the need to attract and retain students in higher education still remained (Tierney, 2004). Early studies (Astin, 1993; Bean, 1980; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975) focused on students who failed to persist in college. According to Astin (1993), student retention and persistence related to the level and quality of their interaction with peers, faculty, and staff. AA male students, in general, have a lengthy and tumultuous history of poor integration within the college environment (Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2013). Bonner (2010) noted AA male students are neglected by the higher educational system, unlike other non-minority groups that tend to prosper. This unfair behavior contributed to adjustment issues, incongruence, and isolation of this particular population (Bonner, 2010).

In the 1970s, institutions shifted their focus to student access (Johnson, 2000). Federal and state legislation began to target and eliminate barriers to higher education. Swail (2004) confirmed the national average for undergraduate retention during the 1970s was 50%. Only half of high school graduates entered into college in the United

States (Swail, 2004). Unfulfilled institutional goals and poor college retention rates spurred more theories to emerge. Johnson (2000) remarked, most of the research and theories conducted during this period were by retention theorists, Tinto (1975) and Spady (1971).

During the 1980s and 1990s, literature on retention theories grew as institutions added student retention to their organizational strategic plans. Notable theorists, such as Bean (1980) and Astin (1984) emerged with new theories based on their own perspectives. Both theorists understood how the world of higher education was changing rapidly. Bean (1980) stressed the importance of putting aside bias and prejudices for the betterment of student satisfaction. As a result, retention literature grew to include minorities, underrepresented populations and others who are disadvantaged. Swail (2004) supported the idea of diversifying and promoting multiculturalism in higher learning. Similarly, Tinto's (1993) literature referenced various student groups including African Americans. Bosco (2012) noted race and gender were influential factors as they related to student retention.

Today the issue of student retention and persistence has continued to gain momentum. In colleges across the United States, retention rates have dropped on average 3% to 5% per year (Seidman, 2005). Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) examined AA and white college student retention figures from the 1990s to the 2000s and reported AA male students retention rates were significantly lower than those of white students. In a 10 year span, the retention figures gap between AA and white students widened. In 1998, for example, nearly 51% of whites and 33% of AA were enrolled in college, but the retention rates reflected a huge discrepancy (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). While some

institutions have attempted to improve their retention rates, Fleming (2012) asserted most of these efforts are ineffective. Most retention efforts fail because special attention is not focused on institutional methods or student needs (Fleming, 2012). Byrne (2006) asserted if institutions of higher education were not able to retain students, eventually they would fall short of their goal of educating students and become non-existent.

Student Retention: Theory Models

For years theory models helped institutional leaders to understand and explain issues of student retention and persistence. These models arose from several science based and psychological disciplines (Tierney, 2004). For example, Tierney's (2004) model of persistence suggests that students need to be provided with the cultural capital necessary to succeed in an educational system where barriers to persistence and integration exist for minority students. Given the importance of FGAA male student success in college, using theory models to guide research and practice, is essential. Many of the most popular and often referenced models were developed by Tinto (1975), Astin (1984, 1993), Spady (1971), and Bean (1980). Ishitani (2006) supported these models and emphasized their influence on student and institutional performance. This section of the chapter is organized around the adaption of Tinto's, Astin's, Spady's, and Bean's theory models as they relate to college student retention and persistence. These theory models collectively provide meaningful insight for AA male students and academic institutions in regards to understanding student retention and persistence.

Vincent Tinto: Departure Theory

Vincent Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2007) theory models are widely recognized for their innovation in the area of student retention and persistence. His literature emphasized the

role both students and institutions play in regards to students' success in higher education. According to Tinto (1993), social and academic integration in the college environment is vital for student retention and is significant for the retention of AA male students. For example, Tinto found the physical environment of the campus to be a factor when determining if a student will remain in college. Academic success and educational outcomes of AA male students on campus are influenced by gender bias, racial favoritism, ethnic prejudices and discrimination (Roach, 2001).

Tinto's (1975, 1993) model of Student Departure is widely held as a prototypical framework for understanding why students leave college. Within this theory, he proposed three factors that influence student retention and persistence. These factors include (a) precollege characteristics, (b) goals and commitments, and (c) institutional experiences. Table 1 outlines these factors.

Table 1

Student Attributes that Influence Retention and Persistence

Factors	Attributes	Measurement
Precollege characteristics	Family background	Social status, parental education, size of community
	Personal attributes	Gender, race, physical handicap, first-generation
	Skills	Intellectual, social
	Financial resources	Financial aid, other resources
	Dispositions	Motivations, social preferences
Goals and commitments	Precollege education and achievements	High School GPA, placement exams, knowledge of college
	Intentions	Level of dedication to attain educational goals
Institutional experiences	Goals and institutional commitment	Degree of dedication to goals and to the institution
	College academic performance	Receiving passing grades in courses
	Faculty/staff interactions	Inside and outside of the classroom
	Peer group interactions	Social experiences, extracurricular activities, outside commitments

Each factor denotes the movement of students from their pre-college life to the institutional experience. Tinto's models conceptualize the influences of persistence and the factors impacting retention. He asserted the concept of student departure is derived from the student's perspective. As AA male students assess themselves in college, they ultimately make the decision to stay or leave. The decision is usually tied to their goals and integration into the college environment (Tinto, 1993).

Further, Tinto contended his models on student integration and departure were influential in understanding student retention and persistence. Tinto's (1975, 1993) retention models emphasized the importance of how social integration is key to student retention and academic success. The two forms of integration as expressed by Tinto

(1975) include academic and social integration. Academic integration happens when students embrace the scholarly side of campus life, whereas social integration is about forming relationships and being active on campus. Tinto (1975) maintained both forms of integration are equally essential to increase the likelihood of student retention and persistence (p. 110). In general, academic and social integration work together to positively influence students' ongoing educational goals and commitments. Tinto's model is illustrated in Figure 2.

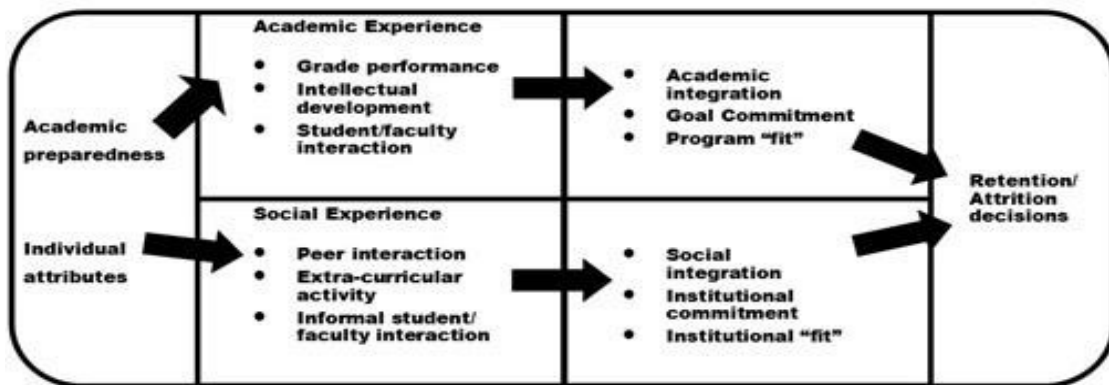


Figure 2. Tinto's Model (Tinto, 1975)

Tinto's model has been cited in various studies on retention and persistence in higher education. For example, Astin's (1984) study emerged as a result of Tinto's theoretical model on retention. Astin showed how successful students' postsecondary education is linked to their social and academic involvement on campus (Astin, 1984). He found students who were engaged in social and academic activities to be more successful than their peers lacking these values. Tinto (1975) also credited the work of Durkheim (1951) as a major influence on the development of his theories (Tinto, 1993). For example, Tinto (1993) noted Durkheim's (1951) suicide theory was instrumental in explaining and predicting student behavior. Students who fail to socially integrate and have limited interaction with their peers may commit suicide (Tinto, 1993). Tinto viewed

this as a form of “egoistic” suicide. Egoistic suicide often occurs when individuals have a low level of integration into society (Tinto, 1993).

Most theory models are based on levels of commitment from the student in the areas of socialization and academia (Astin, 1984; Fleming, 2012; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 1993). For example, Tinto’s Interactionalist Theory (1993) encouraged institutions to focus on the types of interactions – social and academic – as a rationale to explain retention. According to York (1999), some retention theories often assess a phenomenon in a way that excludes the student’s perspective. Even where not explicitly stated, student retention is grounded in the theoretical notion that student retention and persistence is tied to successful social and academic integration into a college environment. According to Tinto (2007), retention is based on a student’s ability to adapt to the academic and social demands of college life.

Students who integrate well into the institutional environment are likely to be satisfied with their social and academic experiences (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2005). According to Tinto (1993), students who are not socially or academically integrated into an educational institution are more likely to drop out of college. Given the substantial effect student retention and persistence has on institutions of higher education, students dropping out can be equated to “educational suicide” (p. 144). For example, students who find themselves isolated or disconnected from the social and academic culture of the institution are more apt to deviate from their goals. Finding the right social and academic fit is essential for student success in college (Soria & Stebleton, 2012).

Tinto's (1975) theory emphasized the importance of successful, social, and academic integration on retention and persistence. He remarked, "Students who are socially and academically integrated are more likely to persist until degree completion" (p. 181). His model showed integration at the core, while its primary focus included the academic and social constructs of the institution. Integration into the college environment is the portion of the theory that embodies relationships amongst institutional leaders, peers, faculty, staff and students. However, Tinto's theory stressed a student's integration with the academic and a social system within a college environment is influential to their retention outcome. Students who often have positive interactions in the college environment are most likely to stay, while negative experiences lead to withdrawal (Adams, 2011). Tinto's model has been revised over the years from its original publications. Most notably, Tinto's later versions emphasized the importance of educators understanding the barriers that various racial groups face, largely AA males.

Alexander Astin: Student Involvement Theory

Astin's (1984) theory of Student Involvement described student's interaction in the college environment. He referred to the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy students invest in college (Astin, 1984; 1993). Astin's theory focused on what he called the input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) model. In reviewing other foundational retention literature, it is clear Astin's (1984) model assessed the physical and psychological behavior (i.e., involvement) as it relates to student development. Students who are involved in social activities and enjoy college life are likely to do well in and out of the classroom (Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007). Thus, Astin developed the theory of involvement to explain how students learn by

becoming involved in college life. He believed student learning and development, the core concepts of his model, directly link to the quantity and quality of their involvement.

To elaborate on the I-E-O model, Astin (1993) repeatedly emphasized the need for students to become socially and academically engaged in college. The first layer of the model refers to student inputs. Inputs are the student's qualities and characteristics upon their initial entry into college (Astin, 1993). This includes student's demographics, background and precollege experiences. The environment refers to the various programs, policies, faculty, peers, and educational experiences to which the student is exposed. Student behavior is directly influenced by their educational environment (Ishitani, 2006). The last layer of the model is outcomes. This refers to the student's characteristics, knowledge, attitude, beliefs, and values after they graduate (Astin, 1993). Astin's model is illustrated in Figure 3.

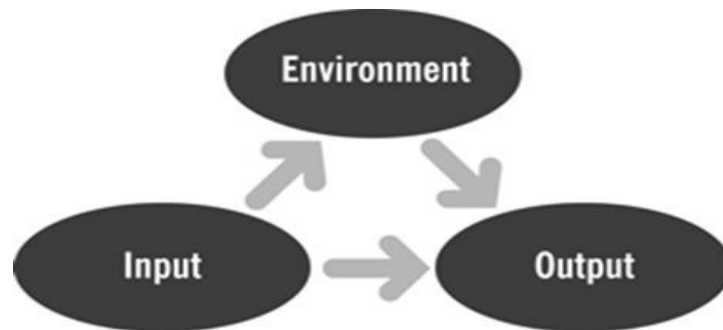


Figure 3. Astin's I-E-O Model (Astin, 1984)

Astin's theory denotes the importance of student involvement in the college experience. He stated student growth and learning takes place as they engage in their college environment (Astin, 1984).

In addition, Astin (1984) explored the connection between student involvement and persistence. He discovered a direct link between the two actions. Astin theorized the connection between student's lack of involvement and their decision to drop out of

college. Student success, in regards to persistence, is conveyed in their academic and social behaviors (Astin, 1984). Specifically, for FGAA male students, HBCUs could a) devote time and resources and b) provide learning opportunities, support services, and programs to encourage student participation in events and activities on and off campus. Like Astin, Davis (2010) believed students who are engaged and integrated in the college experience are more likely to persist to graduation.

Throughout Astin's literature, it becomes more evident that student involvement emerges as an important and critical theme. Astin (1984) proclaimed successful students are a) engaged academically, b) active on campus, and c) interactive with students and faculty. On the other hand, unsuccessful students tend to be a) disengaged from their studies, b) non-participants in regards to campus activities, and c) rarely interact with students and faculty (Astin, 1984). The focal point of Astin's theory centers on student motivation and behavior. Under this model, student's success and failures involve investment in academic relationships and social activities. The more students are involved and engaged with an activity, the more they gain socially and academically (York, 1999).

Astin's (1984) Student Involvement theory addressed the issue of retention and persistence from a systematic perspective. According to York (1999), Astin's (1984) and Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2007) theories hold a common thread that social and academic involvement helps to shape students behavior. Although Tinto's (1975) notion of engagement relates to student involvement from a broader perspective, Astin's theory narrows the scope to individual behavior. This suggests FGAA male students take the initiative to get involved socially and academically in college. Astin (1984) encouraged

institutions to keep a record of institutional policies and practices to achieve the utmost student involvement and learning. Even today, professionals in higher education continue to learn from Astin's theory model.

William Spady: Student Attrition Theory

Spady's (1971) model on Student Attrition focused on the sociological factors of retention and persistence. Students drop out of college because they don't feel supported by institutions of higher learning (Spady, 1971). The Student Attrition model was the first systematic approach to understanding student departure from a particular social system. Spady (1971) described the process of attrition as an integration between the student and their college environment. Spady's model proposed five variables that affect student retention and persistence: (a) academic potential, (b) normative congruence, (c) academic performance, (d) intellectual development and (e) friendship support. Of the five variables proposed, Spady (1971) identified academic performance as the most dominant factor. Students who are not connected to the institution's social system are primarily at-risk of not being retained. The Attrition model (see Figure 4) is highly regarded by college administrators as a paradigm for understanding why students leave college.

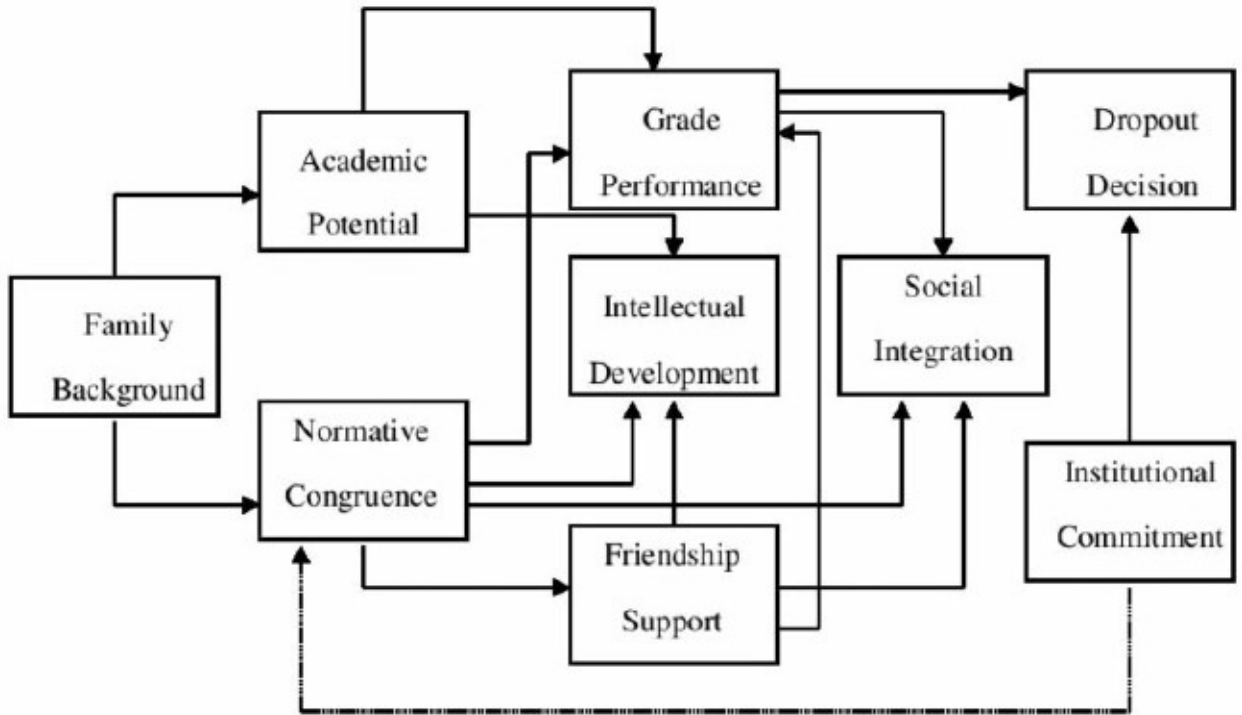


Figure 4. Spady's Attrition Model 1971. (Spady, 1971)

Spady (1971) applied Durkheim's early work related suicide to college attrition. Durkheim (1951) believed educational suicide occurred when students failed to share the same academic and social values of the institution. He identified four types of suicide: altruistic, anomic, fatalistic, and egotistical. Each type of suicide represents a level of social withdrawal conducive to the social environment as opposed to the individual student (Durkheim, 1951). In addition, Spady (1971) related Durkheim's theory of lack of social integration to the social system known as the university. He explored the behaviors of students and found persistence is based on contextual structures and shared values. In essence, the Attrition model incorporates aspects of Tinto's (1993) model which demonstrated how the integration of academic and social integration may offset educational suicide leading to intent to stay.

John Bean: Psychological Theory of Retention

Bean (1980) contributed to the field of student retention based on various theories referencing Spady's and Tinto's models. His "Psychological Model of Student Retention" was heavily influenced by the attitude and behavior of students (Bean & Eaton, 2000). The primary theme of Bean's model emphasized that student departure is associated with their pre-intentional plan to leave college. The decision to leave college stems from a psychologically motivated behavior (Bean & Eaton, 2000). Furthermore, Bean (1980) stressed the importance of the following in regards to students' departure from college: (a) academic performance, (b) background characteristics, (c) socioeconomic status and (d) overall satisfaction with the institution. As with Tinto's (1993) and Spady's (1971) models, Bean's model reflects students' attitudes and behaviors as they relate to their educational experiences.

Bean's (1980) model is based on four psychological theories. These theories include (a) self-efficacy, (b) attribution, (c) coping behavior and (d) attitude behavior. Each of these theories represents the interaction of personal factors and social influences. They also explain how student's attitude and behaviors affect their interactions with the institution. Bean's (1980) model described these attitudes and behaviors and sought to identify the underlying causes. Similar to Tinto's (1993) model, students' psychological processes are impacted by their social and academic performance. Bean's model elaborates on Tinto's model. To better understand Bean's model, the graphical representation provided in Figure 5. The diagram illustrates how students' pre-college characteristics influence their academic and social interactions in the institutional environment.

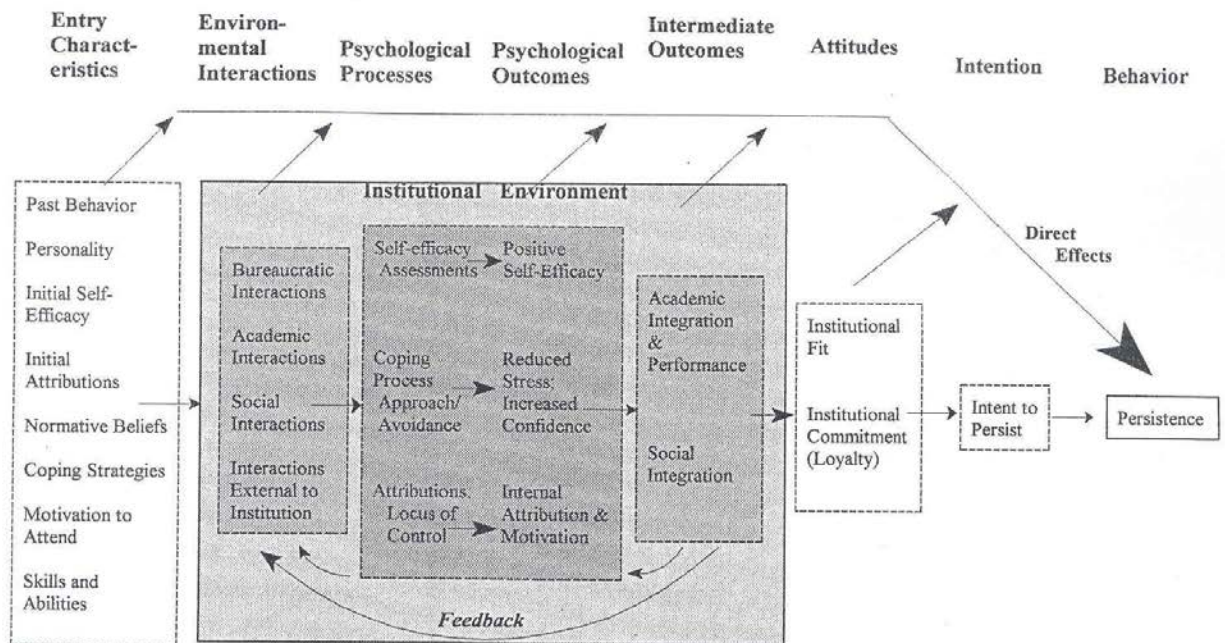


Figure 5. Bean's Psychological Theory Model. (Bean & Eaton, 2000)

Albert Bandura (1995), known as the founder of social cognitive theory, has produced work on the importance of self-efficacy—the belief in one's own capability to pursue and accomplish a specific task. This key component of human agency empowers students to reflect on their thinking and behavior (Bandura, 1989). Human agency diminishes the perspective of AA male students as helpless victims and promotes levels of performance that influence other events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1995). By way of self-efficacy, AA male students have a larger role in how they approach goals, tasks, and challenges. Bean's (1980) theory has made great strides towards our understanding of the student development process and retention.

Ishitani (2006) observed students' beliefs towards their experiences as they relates to their educational outcome can be indicated by their behavior. According to Bean's (1980) Attribution Theory, students attempt to understand the behaviors of others by

attributing feelings and beliefs towards their actions. For example, reinforcement of behavior hinges on the expectations of the outcome (Flowers, 2004). Students' mindsets and beliefs about their abilities to succeed in college affect their subsequent behavior. The Attribution Theory simply looks at how people (AA male students) interpret the actions of others by their behavior. Bean (1980) asserted student's interpretation of the reasons behind past events influences their future actions.

In social science, coping with the conscious effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems relates significantly to this study as well (Bandura, 1995). According to Bean (1980), the Coping Behavior Theory consists of approach (move toward) and avoidance (move away) behaviors. It includes the concept of adjustment and adaption. Adjustment involves fitting into the educational environment while adaption refers to coping in a particular situation (Bean, 1980). Tinto's (1993) model bolsters some similarities between the terms adjustment and integration. Likewise, adaption is the method of adjustment as it relates to a new environment. Bean and Eaton's (2000) study on student behavior found coping is the collection of behaviors an individual utilizes to adapt to a new environment (i.e., college). Therefore, coping relates to the adaption and adjustment for students to their college environment. Students who are able to successfully "cope" in college tend to be more socially and academically engaged and motivated (Bandura, 1995).

Bean's (1980) model also identified an additional factor impacting student retention. Students' attitudes and behaviors are important aspects in the institutional environment. Bean and Eaton (2000) identified several other contributory factors to these attitudes and behaviors as they relate to retention and persistence: (a) background;

(b) finances; (c) academic performance; (d) social and economic; and (e) institutional fit. On the basis of these factors, students develop attitudes toward their experiences and norms related to their behaviors (Bean & Eaton, 2000). The Attitude Behavior Theory described how students' attitudes predict their behavior (Bandura, 1989). For example, students with a positive attitude toward their educational goal attainment may often experience heightened levels of success in college.

Retention Barriers

According to Bosco (2012), limited literature is available in regards to best practices for retaining AA males in college. The University System of Georgia (USG) reported low retention rates for AA male students (31.2%) compared to white male students (55.7%) over a 4- year period (USG by the Numbers, 2017). The retention disparity between subgroups may also be attributed to other factors including social and academic belonging, financial concerns, lack of institutional and faculty support, and being underprepared as a student, all influential factors in regard to retention (Palmer, Wood, & Arroyo, 2015). Bosco (2012) articulated such barriers present a blurring challenge for institutional leaders and requires practical and holistic solutions.

Sufficient evidence exists to suggest that acts of racism influence AA male students' academic and social performance in college (Franklin, 2016). As a result, AA male students feel isolated and displaced on campus. Cross and Frost (2016) suggested that subtle racism on college campuses create uncomfortable environments and lower the quality of AA male students' college experiences. They also asserted that many AA male students report their experiences of racism and stereotypes as stressors to their psychological wellbeing (Franklin, 2016). Still the degree to which racist acts adversely

affect AA male students is a major issue impacting retention and persistence (Cross & Frost, 2016). Epstein (2017) revealed that racism on college campuses has gone unacknowledged for far too long. Unfortunately, this creates retention barriers for AA male students and impacts their college success (Strayhorn, 2016; Franklin, 2016).

In 1975, Tinto conducted one of many studies on students in the college environment. One of the themes that often emerged regarding minority (AA males) students was the need to fulfill “their sense of belonging” (O’Keeffe, 2013). Out of the 250 students studied, more than half reported the decision to remain in college was mainly influenced by their ability to successfully integrate both academically and socially (O’Keeffe, 2013). In addition, Tinto (1975) articulated a student’s sense of belonging—though psychological—correlates to their ability to mentally adjust academically and socially. This includes successful peer and faculty interactions, extracurricular activity involvement, classroom engagement and connection to the academic community (O’Keeffe, 2013). For example, students who experience a positive “sense of belonging” in their freshmen year typically stay for a second year.

Over the last decade, several theories have materialized attempting to explain the relationship between student involvement and retention (Falchikov, 2013). Astin’s (1984) research denoted the influence of student involvement with their social and academic outcomes in higher education (Astin, 1984). According to Astin (1984), students must be actively engaged in their surroundings in order to learn and grow in college. Spady (1971) agreed student success connects to involvement in the campus environment. Astin (1984) offered the following observations regarding student involvement:

- The level of students' academic and social involvement on campus impacts their success.
- The quality of effort put forth by institutions, as it relates to getting them involved on campus, influences student success.
- The extent to which students are engaged with their faculty and peers at an institution impacts persistence.

Student involvement is an important aspect of a student's college experience.

Student involvement in the college environment requires interaction with faculty and equally importantly, their peers (Trotter & Roberts, 2006). This would include being active in campus activities and student organizations. For example, FGAA males should consider becoming affiliated with a Greek organization. In addition, students may also become involved with campus life through service learning programs and athletics. Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service initiatives, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (O'Grady, 2014). These types of programs also promote academic awareness and assist with building relationships with community leaders and fellow students (Ross, 1998). Likewise, athletic participation remains an integral part of student involvement in campus life. Playing in games, wearing the school colors, and competing against rival teams—positively affect student's college experiences. Bean (1980) concluded students involved with campus programs and extracurricular activities feel more loyalty towards their institution and they tend to persist.

Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004) proclaimed socially interactive FGAA male students tend to be retained at higher levels. Davis' (2010)

qualitative study of college students suggested socially active students perform better academically compared to their peers, thus prompting them to stay the course. Perna and Swail (2003) referenced Tinto's (1975) model noting social interactions influence student's learning and development. For example, hostile environments tend to promote alienation or exclusion, whereas peaceful environments encourage inclusion and acceptance (Fleming, 2012). Tinto (1975) revealed social interaction is a factor that contributes to students dropping out of college. Students that experience positive social interactions are more likely to stay as opposed to those that have negative experiences (Perna & Swail, 2003). O'Keeffe (2013) argued social interaction is a major factor in regards to a student's journey to fulfill their sense of belonging.

In addition to the students need to fulfill a "sense of belonging" when addressing retention, financial concerns also impact persistence and ultimately academic and social success (O'Keeffe, 2013). Financial issues have become more obvious as institutions of higher learning (including HBCUs) have increased their tuition on an annual basis (Lim, Heckman, Montalto, & Letkiewicz, 2014). Bosco (2012) reported the cost to attend a public university increased by 15% between 2009 and 2011. According to Bosco (2012), HBCUs typically receive lower appropriations from state funding sources as opposed to other traditional institutions. College affordability is a concern for many AA male students, especially those classified as low-income (Bosco, 2012). Furthermore, Byrne (2006) revealed financially challenged students impose the greatest risk in regards to their decision to persist. Most notably is the impact financial aid (lack thereof) and tuition increases have had on AA males, particularly FGAA males (Byrne, 2006).

Bean and Eaton (2000) stated financial hardships limit educational access. Financing a college education is a vital issue for AA males. Socioeconomic status is a major factor that hinders the AA male's opportunities to pursue a postsecondary education (Gallien & Peterson, 2005; O'Keeffe, 2013). Consequently, many AA males, particularly low-income students, are less likely to enroll in college and pursue a degree. Kim and Conrad (2006) explained the Higher Education Act of 1965 was created to provide financial assistance for students in postsecondary and higher education. Since many students who rely on financial assistance are low-income and first-generational, legislation enacted in 1965 was intended to be a source of relief to unmet aid issues (Kim & Conrad, 2006). Lack of financial aid options impacted AA males' decisions to attend college as well as their choice of college (Lang, 1988; Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2013). Therefore, there exists a direct correlation between a student's socioeconomic background and educational persistence (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Harper, 2012; Ward & Siegel, 2012).

Institutional and faculty support influence retention and persistence in higher education (Adams, 2011; Tinto 1993). Schudde (2011) found AA males less prepared for the rigors of college are often successful when directly embraced by an institution. Institutional efficiency and accountability are key measures and focal points in higher education. Jehangir (2010) noted institutional support systems vary from institution to institution. However, the type of institution directly influences the process. Like Schudde (2011), Merisotis and McCarthy (2005) found at HBCUs AA students are more likely to complete their undergraduate degree and have better experiences on campus. Schudde (2011) confirmed institutions must have a certain level of commitment towards

their students. A student's ability to adapt to college greatly depends on the student's perception of the institutional support system. If the institution's system is poor, AA males may become disengaged from the campus environment (Schudde, 2011).

Schudde (2011) captured the experience in her study on how policies, practices, and campus environments can produce barriers to student success. She reported there exists a dire need for student involvement in higher education, particularly for minorities who have long been underrepresented in postsecondary education because they often lack a voice (Schudde, 2011). Similar to Astin, Schudde's study explored variations in the effect of college experiences on student retention. This included examining college aspects such as campus residency and peer relationships (Schudde, 2011). In most cases, FGAA males are often disengaged and self-alienated from the academic and social activities and events on campus (Ward & Siegel, 2012). Educators at HBCUs have recognized this critical issue that adds to the overall problem in the educational system (Flowers, 2004).

Many college administrators at HBCUs argued AA male students' academic performance and educational goals are impacted by their relationship with faculty (Kim & Conrad, 2006; Strayhorn, 2016). Seidman (2005) conducted a qualitative study to examine interactions between students and faculty and collected data through observations and interviews. Results of this study revealed the positive influence student-faculty interactions had on student retention and persistence. Students who were more actively engaged in class, demonstrated a positive attitude, aspired for educational goal attainment, and experienced positive interactions with their faculty. Students in the study also acknowledged the powerful role played by the faculty in meeting their social,

emotional, and educational needs. Flowers (2004) echoed similar sentiments on the influence of faculty support to increasing AA male students' chances to achieve academic and social success in college.

Kim and Conrad (2006) demonstrated institutional and faculty support systems prove to be critical resources in regards to student retention and persistence. They revealed 24 out of 25 HBCUs ran successful support systems. Adams (2011) expressed strong support systems promote successful progression for AA males in college. Likewise, support systems help to alleviate some of the racial and ethnic prejudices AA males experience on campus by addressing issues such as discrimination and social acceptance by institutional leaders and faculty (Strayhorn, 2016).

Further, AA males attending HBCUs admitted social non-acceptance and discriminatory acts directly influence their academic success and educational outcome (Byrne, 2006). Many HBCUs have restructured their institutions to embrace and promote active support systems. According to Byrne (2006), active support systems allow opportunities for meaningful student and faculty interactions. Kim and Sax (2017) identified these important factors for the academic and social success of many AA male students. As a result, many AA male students are more equipped to deal with the rigors and demands of college.

Early studies (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2007) focused on the characteristics of students who failed to persist in college. Factors influencing retention (see Table 2) are categorized at multiple levels: 1) individual, 2) institutional, and 3) social and external. At the individual level, students' performance and behavior in the college environment is the driving factor. Tinto (2007) suggested students' academic and

social involvement impacts their individual performance. The input of institutional resources mixed with student involvement parallel academic success (Cuyjet, 2006). Students are positively influenced by social opportunities that exist on campus. In addition, social and external factors directly influence retention. The significance is determined by the level of social and family support administered to the student. Students with strong family support systems were more than likely to persist in college (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Brooms & Davis, 2017).

Table 2

Factors Influencing Retention

Individual Levels	Examples
Academic Performance	College GPA, high school GPA, course load and credits earned, academic self-discipline.
Attitudes and Satisfaction	Positive attitude about academics, commitment to college, sense of belonging, and social connectedness.
Institutional Level	Example
Academic Engagement	Undergraduate research activities, university size, opportunities to join clubs, mentoring, advising, financial support.
Social and External Level	Examples
Social and Family Support	Faculty and staff support, family support, familiar and authentic cultural environment, sense of belonging and community, mattering or sense of importance.
Academic Performance	College GPA, high school GPA, course load and credits earned, academic self-discipline.

Often, FGAA male students lack the cultural capital of academic and social skills and knowledge that college-educated parents pass along to their children (Howard, 2013). Cultural capital is a term associated with the culmination of cultural experiences viewed

as educational and social assets (Pascarella et al., 2004). Since FGAA male students lack cultural capital, they are more likely to experience a greater level of frustration and failure compared to their peers which leads to feelings of alienation, academic and social withdrawal, and rejection (Pascarella et al., 2004). According to Pascarella et al. (2004), FG students typically lack a) family support, b) financial assistance, c) knowledge about higher education, and d) academic preparation. Furthermore, Pascarella believed FG students often have low socioeconomic status and are plagued by gender and racial bias. Therefore, FGAA male students must acquire cultural capital as a means to succeed both socially and academically in college (Ward & Siegel, 2012).

Toldson and Cooper (2014) concluded retention and persistence issues are prominent at HBCUs. Consequently, there are several contributing factors that impact FGAA male students' retention and graduation rates (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Tinto (1993) and Bean (1980) have provided theories to help understand student retention and departure. These theories can provide guidance to college administrators as they shape institutional policies, programs, and services. Building from Tinto's and Bean's models, college leaders have the potential to gain in-depth knowledge in regards to why students exit college early (Lang, 1988). FGAA male student retention is a valid issue; however, limited efforts (i.e., time, resources) have been committed to bring forth a resolution (Calhoun, 2016). Adams (2011) believed student departure is associated with such factors as demographics, economics, social integration, and institutional adjustments.

Retention Strategies

Literature pertaining to retention strategies revealed solutions formulated by institutions to address low retention and graduation rates. Tinto (2007) defined student

retention as a process in which a student enrolls and persists to degree completion at an institution of higher learning. The ideal strategies in retention, as described by Tinto (1993), are rooted in the needs and goals of the students. No single blanket strategy can be applied to one or more academic institutions (Johnson, 2000). Therefore, some institutions established a range of strategies aimed at increasing retention and graduation rates. For example, Perna and Swail (2003) study showed a positive correlation between student-faculty interactions and student retention. In addition, O’Keeffe’s (2013) study highlighted the encouraging impact of mentoring on underprepared, low-income students. Lastly, Flowers’s (2004) research provided insight into student retention improvement through advisement strategies.

According to Wiggins (2011), the student perspective is missing in the discourse regarding college experiences of FGAA male students. This includes more in-depth explorations of the experiences of FGAA male students at HBCUs. More specifically, identifying the successful practices employed by high achieving FGAA males students. Brooks, Jones, and Burt (2013) defined student success as, “when students reach their educational goals, and in the process change their perspectives on themselves and the world around them” (p. 209). Seidman (2005) asserted student success was based on the student’s perception of a favorable and desirable academic outcome. These outcomes included the following:

- Student Retention (Persistence) – students remain and continue their undergraduate studies.
- Academic Achievement – students achieve satisfactory (i.e., 2.5 GPA) or superior levels (i.e., 3.5 or higher GPA) of academic performance.

- Educational Attainment – the highest level of education successfully completed by a student.

Success means increased self-confidence, increased knowledge, and setting higher goals for the future (Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2013). Most FGAA male students are faced with issues surrounding retention, persistence, and degree obtainment, yet many are successfully fulfilling their educational goals (Gallien & Peterson, 2005). Therefore, a portion of current research should focus on the college survival strategies used by high achieving FGAA male students (Adams, 2011).

Student-Faculty Interaction

Perna and Swail's (2003) research study provided insight on the importance of student-faculty interactions. This study was conducted at 20 college sites with over 200 participants. Based on student responses, nearly 79% agreed successful student-faculty interactions were critical to their decision to remain in college. Tinto's (1975) and Bean's (1980) respective models were used to describe and categorize these interactions as they relate to retention. In addition, Perna and Swail (2003) attested there is a strong relationship between the two variables (i.e., students and faculty). For example, certain aspects of the student-faculty interaction have shown to influence the academic and social performance of the student (O'Keeffe, 2013). Some of these aspects include both formal and informal interactions. Although most student-faculty interactions occur in the classroom, students who experience a mixture of interactions tend to be more motivated, engaged and actively involved in the learning process (Ross, 1998). Perna and Swail (2003), citing their geometric model, described three forces that account for student outcomes: cognitive, social, and institutional factors.

Perna and Swail's (2003) study also focused on the three factors impacting student outcome. Like student-faculty interactions, these factors weigh heavily on a student's ability to succeed in college. Cognitive factors relate to a student's academic ability (Perna & Swail, 2003). This includes their level of proficiency in reading, writing, and math. The study showed cognitive factors directly impacted performance and learning in college. Next, social factors affect students' lifestyles, such as their personalities, attitudes, and interactions (Perna & Swail, 2003). Tinto (1993) alluded to the fact social factors are used to determine a student's belonging. For example, AA male students typically have to feel accepted, supported, and encouraged to thrive in a college environment (Ross, 1998). Last, institutional factors refer to the college's culture, practices, and strategies (Perna & Swail, 2003). Ross (1998) recommended students take advantage of mentoring, advising, and financial support programs offered by the college.

Mentoring

O'Keeffe's (2013) research article on student retention strategies showed mentoring is a key initiative aimed at improving retention and persistence. O'Keeffe contended mentoring occurs when a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person. O'Keeffe (2013) asserted mentoring offered social and academic support to students which impacted their overall college experience. According to LaVant, Anderson, and Tiggs (1997), mentors offer their expertise to students in an effort to help them learn, grow, and become more effective personally and professionally. More specifically, mentors provide emotional and psychological support which develops into meaningful learning opportunities. At

several institutions, there are formal mentoring programs that provide advising and support services to AA students (Watson, Washington, & Stepteau-Watson, 2015). For example, the University of Georgia offers a mentoring program to assist AA students through advising, counseling, and other activities to encourage and support diversity (USG, 2017).

Academic Advising

Academic advising plays a major role in a student's decision to stay and persist in college. According to Ray, Hilton, Wood, and Hicks (2016), advising is a best practice which stresses collaboration amongst students and administrators. The interaction a student has with their advisor is crucial to the institutions efforts to reduce attrition (Johnson, 2000; Calhoun, 2016). Garibaldi (2017) and Lang (1988) argued academic advising is vital to AA male retention because it keeps them engaged, motivated, and inspired to obtain their educational goals. According to Tinto (2007), academic advising should be an integral part of a student's first-year experience and should promote student development. In a study conducted by the National Academic and Advising Association, several institutions of higher learning were found to be administering ineffective advising programs which negatively impacted their retention and persistence rates (York, 1999). AA males must be encouraged to take advantage of resources that promote academic success, such as academic advising, which influence retention by integrating students into the college environment (Garibaldi, 2017; Lang, 1988).

First Generation College Students

Ward and Siegel (2012) defined FG students as those individuals originating from a family in which no parent or guardian has earned a baccalaureate degree. Many AA

males entering college are underprepared and are severely hampered by low retention and graduation rates (Ishitani, 2006). The college completion rate for AA males continues to lag behind that of other racial and ethnic groups (USG by the Numbers, 2017). Tinto (1993) affirmed AA males, specifically FGAA, attend colleges and are considered an at-risk population. All too often, FGAA male students face a variety of barriers to learning that put them at risk of failure to persist and graduate with a 4-year degree. At-risk students typically 1) make poor choices or decisions that negatively impact their academics, 2) possess low academic self-concepts, and 3) have academic and physical limitations not identified before enrolling in higher education (Tinto, 1993).

Ward and Siegel (2012) and Pascarella et al. (2004) found FG students categorized as at-risk had the highest dropout rate and were more likely to exit college within their first year. Both Ward and Siegel (2012) and Pascarella et al. (2004) investigated FG students from HBCUs and public and private Universities in different geographical locations. The diverse population of FG students, campus locations, and the large sample size were key factors in the studies (Pascarella et al., 2004; Ward & Siegel, 2012). Study samples consisted of approximately one-third of each of the campuses population. However, the study was limited in that only 5% of HBCUs participated (Pascarella et al., 2004; Ward & Siegel, 2012). Apart from the lack of HBCUs that participated in the study, the researchers showed recruitment and retention efforts are working in higher education.

Above all, the implications from the studies conducted by Ward and Siegel (2012) and Pascarella et al. (2004) showed multiple barriers to success for FG students. Some of these diverse challenges stemmed from areas including a) academic performance, b)

learning support, c) social and academic engagement, and d) emotional well-being (Wiggins, 2011). In reflection of the known challenges, institutional leaders are concerned about the great disparities amongst the FG student's success rates in comparison to their peers. Jehangir (2010), Adams (2011), and Davis (2010) found graduation rates for FG students were below 15% compared to non-FG students at 75%. FG students are less likely to stay and persist in college in comparison to non-FG students (Ishitani, 2016; Lang, 1988).

Swail (2004) articulated FG students lack social and cultural capital related to success in higher education because they did not acquire it from their parents. Nearly 5.9 million (25%) of all undergraduates across the nation are FG students (Ward & Siegel, 2012). These estimates are strictly based on how institutions define FG students. For example, some institutions may focus on college attendance while others may consider parents that are college graduates (Swail, 2004). In addition, FG students are different from other college students (Ishitani, 2006). For the most part, FG students are typically: a) minority, b) low-income, and c) at-risk (Davis, 2010; Harper, 2012). Davis (2010) revealed FG students are disproportionately AA males enrolling and attending college for the first time. According to the Office of Institutional Research at the study's location, 20% of FGAA males earned bachelor's degrees within six years based on Fall 2007 cohort (USG by the Numbers, 2017). This is based on a comparison with other non-FG student's completion rates on campus.

According to Ward and Siegel (2012), FG students lack the values gained from parents who support and assist non-FG students, as they navigate the college experience. In their work on FG college students, Ward and Siegel primarily focused on the college

going experiences of this student population. FG students also lack many of the advantages their non-FG counterparts enjoy because their parents are unfamiliar with the information, jargon, and cultural awareness students need to tackle the challenges of the college environment (Ward & Siegel, 2012). These variances hinder FG students as they attempt to navigate the path towards success in higher education. Davis (2010) contended parental education (in regards to college life) and involvement is essential to FG student positive outcomes. Despite these obstacles, some FG students manage to move forward, with little guidance from family and peers, in pursuit of a higher education (Hines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). Further, FG students' college experiences have provided them with the internal will necessary to overcome any obstacles placed before them (Jehangir, 2010). Because of this underlying will, some FG students are forging a path of success in higher education.

Jehangir (2010) credited AA male student success to the high level of perseverance gained throughout their life journey. It is evident in the literature that FGAA male students face more challenges than their white counterparts (Wright, 2016). The most noticeable area of difference is academic and social outcomes. Since FGAA male students precollege and college experiences are different than their counterparts, they tend to be more determined and resilient in pursuit of higher education (Brooks & Burt, 2013). Duckworth (2016) suggested that the secret to outstanding achievement is not talent but a special blend of passion and persistence. She referred to this level of perseverance as "grit." Grit is all about what goes through your head when you fall down and how you recover makes all the difference towards success (Duckworth, 2016).

Despite their shortcomings, FGAA male students are personifying drive and perseverance along their path to college success (Franklin, 2016).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Minority-serving institutions, such as HBCUs, serve at least one-third of all AA students enrolled in higher education in America (Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005). HBCUs fill a vital role of serving many AA males who are more likely to come from low-income families and be the first in their family to attend college. HBCUs were established in the nineteenth century to provide open access to higher education for minority students. The amended Higher Education Act of 1965 defined HBCUs as any historically black college or university established before 1964, whose principal mission was the education of AA students (Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005). Serving and retaining AA, as well as FGAA students, at these institutions is critical to HBCUs success.

Mbajekwe (2006) articulated HBCUs opened their doors to AA students when other institutions denied them access. He also argued prior to their establishment, there was no structured higher education system for AA students. Currently there are 103 HBCUs in the United States (Gasman, 2016). Forty of them are public 4-year colleges and universities and 49 are private (Mbajekwe, 2006). The remaining 14 are 2-year colleges of which 11 are public and three are private (Mbajekwe, 2006). History has shown AA students were allowed access to HBCUs and denied access to white college and universities (Berger & Lyon, 2005). As a result, HBCUs became the primary source for providing postsecondary educational opportunities for AA students (Mbajekwe, 2006). Yet, some challenges still exist.

Students who attend HBCUs typically face many challenges in attaining a 4-year degree. These individuals are more likely, than other racial groups, to be low-income and academically disadvantaged. For example, Merisotis and McCarthy's (2005) found 41% of AA students were from families in the lowest income bracket compared to 19% of white students. In addition, over 90% of AA students attending public HBCUs receive need-based federal financial aid because their families rank lower on the socioeconomic scale in comparison to their peers. In addition to financial barriers, AA students are at a greater risk of academic failure. Mbajekwe (2006) discovered more than one-third of AA males were more likely to drop out of high school than any other racial or ethnic group. In 2002, 4% of AA males scored over 1200 on their SATs compared to 23% of white male students (Mbajekwe, 2006). Merisotis and McCarthy (2005) acknowledged low-income and academic disadvantages are significant issues faced by FGAA males attending HBCUs; however, more research is needed to determine a solution for FGAA male students' academic and social growth.

Despite these challenges, HBCUs are single-handedly responsible for increasing educational opportunities for AA students (Mbajekwe, 2006). Toldson and Cooper (2014) asserted HBCUs continue to close the educational achievement gap by providing a more collegial and supportive learning environment for AA male students. Likewise, HBCUs play a major role in the educational system within the United States (Mbajekwe, 2006). They are one of the pipelines for diversification in our society. Lang (1988) stressed the importance of diversified student populations, with respect to ethnicity and gender, in an increasingly global society. When focusing on the broader context of higher education, HBCUs successfully support and serve AA students (Arroyo, Palmer,

Maramba, & Louis, 2017). These institutions are public and private, 2-year and 4-year, selective and open, urban and rural (Kim & Conrad, 2006).

Summary

FGAA students' retention and graduation rates are low in colleges and universities across the United States. Literature reviewed provided in-depth and insightful information and data pertaining to student retention and persistence. Theorists, such as Tinto and Bean, believed a student's decision to continue the pursuit of their degree is linked to their ability to academically and socially integrate into their collegiate environment. Likewise, FGAA male students' socioeconomic factors, inadequate college preparation, and lack of institutional and family support present major challenges to successfully complete college. College administrators also face unique challenges that require the identification of retention barriers and crafting strategies to improve retention and graduation rates. Ward and Siegel (2012) believed greater attention should be paid to creating policies and programs that address the student retention challenge. In addition, HBCUs should continually be positively supported by state and federal policymakers as the institutions were established to provide AA students with a quality educational experience. Though researched literature has provided some contribution to the field of student retention, further studies are needed to address the FGAA male student retention issue at HBCUs.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Low retention and graduation rates are dismal and contribute to the higher education crisis for FGAA male students attending HBCUs. In a larger scope, FGAA male students fail to obtain a degree experience economic, political, social, and cultural challenges in society (Ross, 1998). This study explored the lived experiences of FGAA male students and their practices that influenced their academic and social progression at an identified HBCU to obtain a 4-year degree. This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach to examine the forces that contributed to their academic and social progress in college.

Phenomenological studies explore the experiences of participants to understand the origin of such experiences from the participants' perspective (Gallagher, 2012). The science of phenomenology focuses on the subjective experiences of the individual (Merriam, 2002). Although all qualitative research is phenomenological in the sense that there is a focus on peoples' experiences, a phenomenological study seeks to understand the essence or structure of a phenomenon (Gallagher, 2012). My focus with this study was not on the human subject or the human world but on the essence of the meaning of this interaction (Merriam, 2002). Moustakas (1994) suggested maintaining a balance between subjectivity and objectivity. By maintaining a balanced approach, the results of

this study revealed similarities or dissimilarities in academic and social interactions in the college environment.

Theoretically, phenomenological research is designed to answer questions relating to everyday human experiences (Merriam, 2002). Vagle (2014) reiterated when humans' experience the world, they again find themselves in the experience. Human experiences occur in consciousness but are interpreted based on underlying conditions (Moustakas, 1994). The research in this qualitative study focused on the "essence" of the phenomenon from the perspective of FGAA male students who have experienced it, as well as provided clarity and purpose for the study's research questions:

RQ1: What practices employed by FGAA male students at an identified HBCU to obtain their 4-year degrees proved to be successful and which practices were least successful?

RQ2: Which institutional policies and programs proved to be most supportive or least supportive to FGAA male students at an identified HBCU while obtaining their 4-year degree?

Research Design

Qualitative studies assist researchers with understanding social or human problems (Creswell, 2007). Such information gives the researcher a better understanding and greater perspective of the participants in the study. Qualitative research provides a framework for organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing data (Creswell, 2007). In addition, Patton (2002) conveyed qualitative research methods are a) in-depth and detailed and b) focus on lived experiences in a particular setting. Based on the nature and purpose of this study, quantitative research was not appropriate. Creswell (2007) and

Patton's (2002) explanations match my interest in studying the common practices of successful FGAA males attending an HBCU. Therefore, I utilized the qualitative research method for this study.

In regard to the research design selected for this study, a single-site hermeneutic phenomenological design was used because it is considered the best approach for this study. Merriam (2002) articulated phenomenology focuses on the overall essence of an experience, thus allowing for the perspectives of the people involved in the experience to be captured. With hermeneutic phenomenology, insight is solely based on the experiences, activities, and events present in the participant's world (Vagle, 2014). Further, Husserl (1970) theorized people are dependent and thrive on well-established, ethical relationships within a social environment. Phenomenology studies build on this theory and reveal the lived experiences of the participants.

Outside of hermeneutic phenomenology, transcendental or existential phenomenology could have been utilized; however, hermeneutic better addresses this study because it takes into account lived experiences and includes them within the interpretive process (Vagle, 2014). Vagle (2014) articulated transcendental derives from the viewpoint of a detached observer while existential insists the observer cannot separate himself from the world (Vagle, 2014). According to Husserl (1970), hermeneutic phenomenology generates the viewpoint of those who are engaged in the production of social actions, social situations, and social worlds. This study attempted to identify the common practices of successful FGAA male students who were retained and persisted to graduate from an HBCU. Therefore, a hermeneutic phenomenological design was well suited to capture the lived experiences of the participants (Moran, 2000).

Site and Participant Selection

The research study occurred in various locations on the campus of a HBCU located in southeast Georgia. This HBCU is a 4-year, state supported, institution. The university offers 31 undergraduate and five master's degree programs. Enrollment for 2014 consisted of 4,915 students, of which 57% were female and 43% males (USG by the Numbers, 2017). The enrollment report also indicated 59% of the students enrolled were of FG status. Further, 74% of the students enrolled received Pell Grant funds (USG by the Numbers, 2017). The participants for this study were FGAA males currently enrolled at a HBCU. Sixty-seven percent of the student population were from low-income and educationally challenged backgrounds (USG by the Numbers, 2017). Student data showed FGAA males' overall college grade point average (GPA) from Spring 2011 to Fall 2014 ranged from 2.25 to 2.57 (USG by the Numbers, 2017). This is the lowest rate of all ethnic and gender groups attending this HBCU.

Sample Selection

To gain knowledge about the phenomenon under study, it was vital to select participants who provided the most in-depth and richest data. For this study, participants were selected from each of the academic colleges on the campus. Two participants from the College of Business (COBA), the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CLASS) and from the College of Science and Technology (COST) were interviewed. The participants were chosen through purposeful sampling procedure (Maxwell, 2013). Patton (2002) articulated purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. Five major goals are associated with this particular sampling method (Maxwell,

2013). The two that aligned with the research topic include a) achieving representativeness or typicality of the settings, individuals, or activities selected and b) deliberately selecting individuals or cases that are critical for testing the theories that you began the study with, or that you have subsequently developed (Maxwell, 2013).

Maxwell (2013) asserted researchers must pay considerable attention to issues of sampling and representativeness of the selected participants. The study participants were purposely selected based on the research design. The criteria for participation in the study was based on the following: a) FGAA male, b) currently enrolled at the institution with 90+ earned credit hours, c) GPA 2.5 or higher, and d) Pell Grant recipient.

Moreover, the participants must have attended the institution consecutively for 4-years or more (no re-admits). Through a partnership between the college deans and the registrar's office, students were selected based on the criteria stated. Once selected, questionnaires (10 questions) were distributed to obtain demographic information about the participants. The responses were evaluated and the participant pool was reduced to six. Each of the six participants was asked to provide a copy of their college transcript as proof of enrollment. In addition, participants were informed that this study was strictly voluntary and an Informed Consent form must be completed prior to the data collection stage.

Data Collection

Merriam (2002) asserted the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Because I expected to gain a deeper understanding of FGAA male students' lived experiences, qualitative research was my method of inquiry to guide and support the data collection process. Maxwell (2013) revealed there are three main methods for qualitative data collection. The methods include: (1) participant interviews,

(2) document reviews, and (3) policy reviews. For the purpose of this study, I utilized interviews, documents, and texts as the primary sources of data information.

Participant Interviews

Data was collected via in-depth interviews consisting of semi-structured and predetermined open-ended questions. Given the location of the participants, the interviews were conducted face-to-face. All interviews were conducted by me. To ensure confidentiality and confidence, interviews were conducted in a private, impartial location on the college campus. The interview location was quiet, which allowed clear audio recording for accurate transcription. The responses were recorded and transcribed into word files. Seidman (2006) asserted interviews afford the participants the opportunity to mentally reconstruct their lived experiences while allowing me, the researcher, to capture interpersonal depth and detail from their responses. The selection of this data collection method resided in the notion that phenomenological interviews allow participants to reconstruct their experiences based on the research topic (Seidman, 2006). Likewise, I was very comfortable engaging and conversing with participants within this structured manner.

In regards to the interviews themselves, Seidman's (2006) three-interview series was utilized. People's voices are a major source of qualitative data (Patton, 2002). Thus, the first interview in the series was designed to put the participant's experiences in context by asking them as much as possible about their experiences according to the topic (Seidman, 2006). Below are some sample questions for the first interview:

1. When did you first decide to attend college?

2. How do you feel being the first in your family to attend a 4-year university?
3. What made you decide to attend a HBCU?
4. Tell me about your lived experiences prior to enrolling in college (i.e., family support, financial challenges, educational preparedness).
5. Explain what your transition was like from high school to college.

These questions were intended to get the participants to reconstruct their early lived experiences prior to college. The second interview focused on the concrete details of the participants' present lived experiences (Seidman, 2006). Below are some sample questions for the second interview:

1. How do you define success in college?
2. What motivated you to be successful in college?
3. What were some of the challenges/obstacles you faced during your matriculation?
4. How did you overcome the challenges/obstacles faced during your matriculation?
5. What extracurricular activities are you involved in on/off campus? Do you feel that these activities contributed to your success?
6. What experiences in college (HBCU) have made you successful?

Finally, the third interview asked participants to reflect on what meaning their experience held for them (Seidman, 2006). This was an overall reflection on the meaning as it relates to the research topic. Below are some sample questions for the third interview:

1. What major distractions did you experience as a first-generation student in your efforts to do well socially and academically?
2. What common practices (based on your lived experiences) make a first-generation African American male student successful in college (HBCU)?
3. What social and academic programs and resources offered made your journey successful?
4. Discuss the support systems (e.g., family, friends, peers) utilized during your matriculation?
5. What is unique (i.e., culturally, socially, academically) about first-generation African American male students who successfully attend college (HBCU)?

Seidman (2006) emphasized the importance of adhering to the three-interview structure. Each interview served a purpose both by itself and within the series.

Interviews were scheduled a week apart and did not exceed 60 minutes. Each interview ran between 45 and 60 minutes to allow participants to consciously reflect on the details of their lived experiences. In addition, participant interviews were conducted over an 8 to 10 week period. By utilizing the three-interview series approach, data were gathered from the participants own words and thematic connections were created from their experiences (Seidman, 2006).

Document Reviews

Patton (2002) articulated items that are written can be examined as documents.

This included meeting records, logs, policy statements, transcriptions, and electronic data. These were all considered useful data sources. Specifically, I reviewed the student

participants' records stored within the institutional database. Data associated with high school transcripts, demographic information, academic progress, affiliation with social groups, and financial aid was included. For confidentiality, I requested that certain data elements be extracted so that a personal profile can be built on each FGAA male student who participates in this study. This information was useful for triangulation purposes.

Bowen (2008) asserted data saturation is a key part of qualitative research. The term refers to the process of collecting and analyzing data and ensuring there is an adequate amount to support the study (Bowen, 2008). During the design phase, it should be determined how data saturation is reached. O'Reilly and Parker (2012) explained data saturation is obtained when there is no new data, no new themes, no new coding, and not enough existing information to replicate the study. Based on the type of study design implemented, the levels of saturation will vary. For this study, interviews were the primary method for obtaining data saturation.

Data Analysis

For this study, I utilized Creswell's (2007) "categorical aggregation" of data method. This method allowed me to examine multiple interviews for specific occurrences that arose multiple times within the data. Because each participant's perspective varied, the focus remained on their common practices and lived experiences. Patton (2002) contended qualitative data analysis is an iterative and reflexive process that begins as data is being collected rather than after data collection has ceased. Therefore, the researcher must be receptive to new and emerging ideas as the research study progresses. Creswell (2007), Maxwell (2013), and Patton (2002) all agreed there are challenges in conducting data analysis in qualitative research.

Maxwell's (2013) analytic options offer guidance in regards to the data analysis process. First and foremost, I reviewed written and recorded data from each participant. Creswell (2007) and Maxwell (2013) emphasized reading and thinking about the interview data, developing coding categories, and applying these to your data, analyzing narrative structures and contextual relationships, and creating matrices and other displays are important forms of data analyses. During the review process, data was screened and organized based on the participants' responses. Creswell (2007) revealed screening and organizing promotes familiarity with the data.

Once the review process was complete, I systematically coded the data based on patterns of similar words and phrases. This allowed for the data to be broken out into manageable sections. To assist with data management, Microsoft Word and Excel were used. This software was also utilized to assist with the creation of visual aids for summarizing the data and identifying relationships. In addition, I used coding to interpret and identify patterns and categories in the data (Creswell, 2007). Merriam (2002) noted categorization is an important dimension of data analysis. I used categorization strategy to jump start the process of "theme building" and promote thematic ideas (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, three main themes organically emerged from the data.

Data analysis is learning by doing (Creswell, 2007). Maxwell (2013) admitted the distinction between categorizing and connecting strategies relates directly to understanding qualitative data analysis. Based on the nature of this phenomenological study, the data analysis process is expected to support any lessons learned from the participants' experiences. With this being said, I followed the guidelines as proposed by Creswell (2007). This included incorporating the following steps: a) organized and

prepared the collected data for analysis, b) read through all the data, c) attempted to gain a general sense of the information and reflected on the overall meaning, d) conducted the analysis based on the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, e) coded and organized related segments of data into categories, f) generated a description of the setting or people and identified themes from the coding (i.e., search for theme connections), g) represented the data within a research report, and h) interpreted the larger meaning of the data. According to Creswell (2007), data interpretation is the final stage of the analysis process.

Validity

Elements of validity begin with the researcher's understanding of their own personal biases and subjectivity (Peshkin, 2001). Therefore, issues of validity must be addressed in this study (Merriam, 2002). Validity is defined as the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account (Maxwell, 2013). Based on this definition, I ensured the results of the study were an accurate depiction of the total population. Likewise, I guarded myself against generalizations during interviews by avoiding utilizing leading questions. Peshkin (2001) contended it is vital for a researcher to achieve validity in order to eliminate bias and increase the researcher's honesty about the phenomenon.

The process of triangulation was utilized to ensure validity of the study's results. Creswell and Miller (2000) described triangulation as a method to minimize errors and bias by using multiple sources of information to form themes or categories within a study to strengthen validity. Triangulation allowed me to compare different types of data to see if they validate one another. Triangulation and the three series interview approach were

utilized to validate the study. First and foremost, I reviewed and compared the results of my findings. This included data collected from my interviews and document reviews. Second, I searched for themes promoting regularities in the research data. Third, I checked for consistency in the results and identified patterns. Last, I identified any additional validity threats and documented my findings. Creswell (2007) contended validity is the correlation between the research data and the findings.

Seidman's (2006) three interview structure assisted with ensuring validity among the study's participants. This interview form encouraged interview participants to check for the internal consistency of their responses over the study's time period (Seidman, 2006). Moreover, I was able to connect the participant's lived experiences by comparing their responses simultaneously as well. I utilized the three series interview for data collection purposes. Intertwined between each interview, I noted commentary that assisted with ensuring the viewpoints of the participants were fully credited. More importantly, ethical issues were examined throughout the data collection and data analysis processes to ensure validity was upheld.

From a personal perspective, the greatest threat to validity for this study were my own biases. Maxwell (2013) revealed the two important threats to validity of qualitative research are, "the selection of data that fit the researcher's existing theory, goals, or preconceptions, and the selection of data that "stands out" to the researcher" (p. 124). My personal biases stemmed from my ideas, beliefs, and perceptions of successful AA males in higher education. Peshkin (1991) emphasized ownership of one's own subjectivity is crucial in regards to personal bias management. As an AA female, I

exercised extensive reflection and used alternative lenses in an attempt to seek out subjectivity.

Ethical Considerations

Any additional issues related to the protection and rights of the study's participants were addressed after clearance from the identified university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix G). To guard against potential identity threats, pseudonyms were utilized for each participant's name. Each participant was informed about the focus of the study and their rights pertaining to their participation. Each participant was given the opportunity to ask questions to gain a full understanding of the expectations of the study. It was also communicated that private information shared during the interview process would not be disclosed to other parties.

Merriam (2002) recommends following the IRB policy for Informed Consent. This policy ensures all human subjects' rights are protected in accordance with all federal, institutional, and ethical guidelines (Merriam, 2002). After reading the consent form to the participants, I asked them to sign the form verifying their consent to participate and acknowledging their understanding that the study is strictly voluntary. The participants were given a copy of the consent form and told of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time. Further, contact information was obtained, such as telephone numbers and email addresses, so I could communicate with them in regards to the study.

Last, I explained inappropriate behavior was not be tolerated and would lead to immediate dismissal from the study. As part of the initial process of identifying and selecting participants, the university already had a list of the participants. Creswell

(2007) advised that a fictitious name (pseudonyms) be used to protect the privacy of the participants affiliated with the study. Therefore, participants were assigned pseudonyms, which also allowed for manageable reporting on documents and tracking of their participation.

In regards to the ethical standing on data management, protecting the participant's identity and information was vital. Creswell (2007) recommended only obtaining information related to students meeting the selection criteria and participating in the study. To ensure data collected remains anonymous, participants' names, personal information, and contact information were not released. Each participant was allowed to select his own pseudonym to reinforce confidentiality and assist with identifying themselves in the study transcripts. Participants were allowed to listen to their interview recordings after each session and review final transcripts in order to protect their identity and confirm accuracy of the information. Last, all information and data collected were subject to review by the university's IRB to ensure protection from public disclosure.

Summary

The phenomenological qualitative approach was used to examine the lived experiences and practices employed by FGAA male students concerning their academic and social progression while attending an identified HBCU to obtain a 4-year degree. Purposeful sampling procedures were used to select nine FGAA males to participate in this study. These participants were chosen from each of the academic colleges on campus. Interviews and documents were the major sources of data collection. For data analysis, I utilized Maxwell's (2013) analytic options (i.e., memos, categorizing and connecting strategies). These options assisted the researcher with unraveling the shared

experiences of the participants (Maxwell, 2013). I utilized the triangulation method to check for validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Finally, I ensured the privacy of my participants was protected by following the guidelines of the selected HBCUs IRB policy.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS

This phenomenological study explored practices employed by FGAA male students that influenced their academic and social progression at an identified HBCU in their efforts to obtain their 4-year degrees. Participants reported experiences that enhanced – as well as detracted from – their successful progression in college. FGAA male students were selected through purposeful sampling based on the following criteria: (1) FGAA male currently enrolled at the institution with 90+ earned credit hours, (2) GPA 2.5 or higher and (3) Pell Grant recipient. Data was collected through three sources: participant interviews, document reviews, and policy reviews.

Seidman's (2006) 3-series in-depth open ended interviews were utilized as the main data collection source. Each interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. Interviews were recorded and transcribed into Word files for analysis. In addition, the researcher recorded additional research data such as notable observations in detailed memos. Further data was obtained from documents including student files and policy reviews. Finally, research findings addressed the following questions: 1) what practices employed by FGAA male students at an identified HBCU to obtain their 4-year degrees proved to be successful and which practices were least successful, and 2) which institutional policies and programs proved to be most supportive or least supportive to FGAA male students at an identified HBCU while obtaining their 4-year degree?

This chapter presents important findings from the data analysis process. Qualitative data were collected through a series of three interview sessions with six FGAA male students attending a HBCU. Each set of participants represented the three academic colleges on campus (i.e., College of Business, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the College of Sciences and Technology). During the data analysis process, audio recordings from each interview session were transcribed. These transcriptions were compared and cross referenced with other documents reviewed for the study. Coding enabled me to form categories and formulate themes from specific pieces of data. As themes emerged, I looked for commonalities and grouped them accordingly. One noteworthy aspect of the interview sessions was the way the six participants richly described their lived experiences.

Understanding how the participants felt about their academic and personal experiences was pertinent in regards to helping educators develop awareness of issues existing in the lives of FGAA male students. The theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2 guided the construction of the two research questions for the study. These questions allowed me to acquire first hand perspectives from the participants' lived experiences.

The first interview session asked participants about their pre-college experiences. Questions 1 through 10 inquired about their home and family life. Questions 11 through 23 of the interview protocol were designed for participants to reflect on their elementary, middle, and high school experiences. Participants were asked to share their stories because early experiences can impact social and academic integration. Questions 24 through 32 were geared toward factors influencing their decision to attend college.

The second interview session asked participants to provide details about their college experiences. Questions 1 through 27 inquired about a variety of factors that impact persistence which includes social and academic involvement on campus. Participants were also asked about their perceptions of faculty and staff on campus. In addition, participants were asked to identify challenges, obstacles, and barriers in their personal life that impacted social and academic performance in college. Participants also responded to questions related to their level of satisfaction with the variety of programs and services offered on campus. This included discussion on their knowledge and awareness of college resources for FG students.

The third interview session focused on the participants' overall experiences. Questions 1 through 22 were designed to identify what most influenced them to stay and persist to degree attainment. This particular series of questions allowed the participants to reflect on their lived experiences. Regardless of the participants' individual backgrounds, each highlighted their perceptions and experiences of college life at a HBCU. Each participant discussed how their lived experiences impacted their decision to pursue a postsecondary education. More specifically, correlations of commonalities provided valuable information in regards to retention and persistence.

Fundamental Analysis

Each participant received a copy of the questions to follow along during the sessions. The interview timeframe ranged from 45 to 60 minutes. Approximately 15 minutes was used to setup the PC, read the Consent form, and conduct voice recorder testing. Participants were informed they would receive a copy of their transcript within a week to allow time for review and finalization. Interviews were conducted over an 8

week period; completion of reviewing and coding transcripts was approximately 4 weeks after the final interview.

According to Vagle (2014), hermeneutic phenomenology enriched interviews help to explore and gather narrative material to develop a deeper understanding of a human phenomenon. In the same vein, I used the process of hermeneutic research to analyze transcripts and establish a relationship amongst the participant's interview responses as it related to their lived experiences. Creswell's (2007) method of data analysis further allowed me to analyze the data to identify patterns, themes, and conceptual commonalities. Themes were developed from the data to ensure the participant's responses addressed the research questions and formed an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences.

Participants

This section will introduce each of the six FGAA male participants in this study. Participants shared their stories to include their family background, middle and high school experiences, and other life events that influenced their journey through college. My primary goal was to become familiar with the participants, their goals, insights, and lived experiences to answer the research questions associated with this study. Although the participants encountered challenges along their journey, they found inspiration to get them to and through college.

All participants in this study spent their pre-college years in small to mid-size cities in Georgia. They grew up in low income and single parent homes. All participants reported being raised in urban environments within predominately AA communities. In addition, participant's demographics provided information about their profiles. Basic

demographic information such as race, gender, and FG status was key to understanding some of the personal motives that inspired the participants to enroll and persist in college. Of all the aspects of FGAA male experiences, few are as predictable as the impact of their demographic profiles on their life decisions. Table 3 provides a brief summary of each participant's basic demographic information.

Table 3

Participant's Demographics

Participant	Race	Gender	Major	GPA	FG Status	Pell Grant
Ralph	AA	Male	Marketing	2.8	Yes	Yes
Ronnie	AA	Male	Biology	3.0	Yes	Yes
Bobby	AA	Male	Management	2.6	Yes	Yes
Ricky	AA	Male	Engineering	2.7	Yes	Yes
Mike	AA	Male	Performing Arts	3.2	Yes	Yes
Johnny	AA	Male	Mass Communication	3.1	Yes	Yes

For this study, participants were selected from the population of approximately 4,900 undergraduate students enrolled at a HBCU during the 2016-2017 academic school years. Each participant met the study's criteria and has persisted from Fall 2013 through Fall 2016 (no stop outs). Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality and anonymity

of the study's participants. The following are participant introductions obtained from transcripts of their interview responses.

Ralph

Ralph is a FGAA male student from a small city in Georgia attending a HBCU. At the time of this interview, he was in his final semester as a senior Marketing major. He was raised by a single mother with his stepsisters and brothers. Ralph stated, "I have seven siblings in total... three by my mom and four by my Dad." Ironically, he felt isolated growing up and described himself as "... not family oriented." He lamented, "I used to be considered like the black sheep, so I never really built a relationship or that commonality outside of blood." Likewise, he never quite bonded with his siblings. This prompted Ralph to look outside his family for close relationships. He reflected, "I choose my friends to be my biggest supporters from about middle school through high school." Many times, he sought guidance and support from his friends instead of his family.

Ralph described his childhood neighborhood as a predominately low income Black inner-city area. This neighborhood was plagued with the customary issues commonly associated with inner-cities such as crime, drugs, and poverty. He revealed, "From the beginning half of my life, I stayed in an inner city low income neighborhood with my grandmother. I moved with my mom to the outskirts of town but it was still in section eight apartments." Ralph shared a gloomy picture of his childhood environment. He shared, "I used to live around low income blacks... those who were on government assistance." On a personal level, his family survived on a meager budget where they "didn't have much money" and had to rely on "a lot of government assistance." Ralph

recalled receiving food stamps and social security subsidies for his disabled brother because his mother was unemployed.

Ralph touted his grandmother and aunt for constantly encouraging and supporting him during his early life. They exposed him to a middle class lifestyle of "...summer vacations, a stable functioning household, vehicles, table etiquette... being able to relate, about college, about working, about finances. ... from there I began to always want to achieve higher and excel in my academics." This exposure propelled him to aim for a college education. He conceded his grandmother had the greatest positive influence on him.

Ralph described good and bad experiences in elementary and middle school. On the positive side he "... was kind of like the super star ... excelled in academics, and ... participated in activities like Future Farmers of America." During the bad times, he was often teased for being overweight and called gay for being raised in a household full of women. He shared the following anecdote:

I was an overweight child. I remember I was 108 pounds in third grade and then 151 in sixth grade. I... had a lot of feminine tendencies. So kids would always call me gay and my mom also pierced my left ear at the age of 10 months, so my entire life I had an earring in my ear so kids would be like oh that's a girl thing, you're a fag ... you're gay.

Overtime Ralph learned to be more disciplined and was able to ignore the teasing from his peers. He focused on excelling academically in the classroom.

At school, Ralph was inspired to work hard by one teacher who recognized his intellectual abilities and pledged to assist him with getting scholarships for college

despite his mother's low expectations of him. He attributed his early academic success to this teacher. He shared, "My teacher encouraged me... and that year I was the number one student in our class academically." In high school, Ralph became the popular guy as a member of the high school football team. He failed to balance sports and academics and regretted failing to keep up his grades. He stated about his academic performance during this period:

So my grades went from being very great... being just ok. I didn't make top 10 or honor graduate. I wasn't performing as well as I used to but I was able to recover and finish with a 3.1. I entered college with the HOPE scholarship.

Ralph first experienced racial discrimination in his high school AP class when one teacher disparaged him for having tattoos often associated with gang members. He reflected about his experience:

My AP calculus teacher ... noticed that I had tattoos. I was a young black male and I guess she couldn't really fathom that I was in her AP calculus class so she gave me a really hard time about it.

The situation in Ralph's AP class was bad. He almost dropped out of school but realized he needed the college credit. By necessity, he persevered in spite of the AP teachers negative and racially charged influence. He was singled out in class and always ridiculed by the teacher and peers. This teacher also had a very low expectation of Ralph and did not think he would make it to college.

As an adolescent, Ralph increasingly became conscious of his Black identity. He was inspired by his AP History teacher who had recently graduated from a prestigious Historically Black College. He began to admire and appreciate Black culture. This

teacher "... pushed [him] ... always encouraged [him] to think outside of the box". He encouraged black students "to be pro black." As a young Black man, Ralph felt the need to defend against undue discrimination from peers. One time he was involved in a physical altercation with other students in the cafeteria and earned himself a 10-day suspension from school. He did not regret the suspension as this allowed him school time to watch the first U.S. Black President inauguration. With a keen sense of humor, he interjected, "So I got to watch [President Obama's] inauguration from home."

Ralph had a smooth transition from high school to college. He enjoyed the culture, classes, and close connections with administration and faculty on campus. Ralph has found values that have led to success on campus. At the top of the list are the cultural values he discovered by attending an HBCU. Ralph recalled his AP teacher instilling in him the importance of valuing "our [AA] culture... it pushes you to perform." He revealed, "... when I came here [college] I was able to reflect on what he [AP teacher] actually taught me." Further, Ralph understood success in college is a "process." He has learned to establish goals. He was acutely aware that it was not easy to attain these goals. Ralph admitted, "... along the way there may be some failure or delay within the process but overall just achieving everything or majority of what you set forth and learning from the process."

Ralph attributed his interpersonal strengths as motivators to success. He stated, "I think my social skills. Being able to adapt and adjust to various types of people and just overall being an open and tolerable person... my willingness to learn. Not really ever limiting myself or conforming." His interest in extracurricular activities continued in college where he became the current Student Government Association (SGA) President, a

member of Collegiate 100, and Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. His involvement in these activities helped him navigate through the college environment. Ralph conceded about his extracurricular activities:

SGA helped me understand policy, procedure and it also allowed me to practice my major through campaigning, through business modeling. Collegiate 100 provided me a new definition of what community service was. Alpha fraternity has always provided professionalism for me, brotherhood and just overall an elevated level of protocol and etiquette.

Ralph was committed to getting a college degree for himself and his family. He wanted to be a role model for his seven siblings who are still stuck in an environment that is not very conducive for success. He expressed sympathy as he is painfully aware of the challenges of being "... raised in those conditions and in that environment, [he] can never forget where [he] came from and what is actually still going on there."

Ronnie

Ronnie is a FGAA male senior Marketing major from a small city in Georgia. He was raised by his grandmother whom he regarded as "mother" because she took care of him and his younger brother. His mother was very young and immature so his grandmother stepped in and raised him. He stated, "She didn't really understand... children... wanted to go out and party." Later, as an adolescent, Ronnie drew closer to his mother. He reflected, "My mother and I are very close... I love my mother to death." On the other hand, Ronnie felt let down by his late alcoholic grandfather. He had bad memories of him abusing his young mother. He stated:

He used to cuss my mama, slap us, and call us the B word... like every name in the book except for something positive. I didn't know at the moment that's what alcoholics do. That's just what I seen. So now I have the image in my head that's all alcoholics now. It kind of put that image in my head, you know.

Ronnie's home environment negatively influenced his early educational experiences. He admitted having some bad experiences in middle school. He conceded:

I wasn't always a good child. As I stated growing up in the projects [I] definitely had a lot of negative influence on me. Usually I saw so many things so many aspects of things that's not right. So just having the mind set of going to school thinking I'm big and bad, wanting to fight, always getting sent to the principal's office, [and] smart mouth. That kind of experience influenced me to be so bad in middle school.

Ronnie's extended family and the church community rescued him from imminent disaster. The church provided him with moral guidance that would later turn around his life. He shared:

I still attend church to this day, every Sunday. We grew up in the church, grew up in the choir, been baptized since I was three. My uncle he's a pastor now. He's like a daddy figure to us because it's just my mama, a single parent. She doesn't always have it, still to this day she doesn't always have it. So my uncle and my aunt is pretty much who we can really depend on. She's a first lady and he's a pastor. My grandmother is in the church, God fearing woman. So she really has raised us right.

On the other hand, his grandmother provided him maternal love and nurturing. He reminisced growing up with his grandmother:

My grandmother always made a way out of no way. [She] always made a way to have food on the table, clothes on our back, and shoes on our feet. She was just a very strong person. She was bold and courageous. She didn't allow anything to stop her. No matter what situation came about she always told us don't give up, rise up. I actually utilized that for my platform in college.

Consequently, he began to value education and participated in school activities. Ronnie stated, "I started in band in fifth grade and finished my sophomore year in college." He relished being surrounded by great teachers in middle school. His favorite teacher was Ms. D. He recalled, "She was my favorite teacher because she pushed me to keep going. When no one else believed in me, she did." Overall when asked, "What did you enjoy about middle school?" Ronnie responded:

I would say the thing that I enjoyed the most was going to school and being around people with different stories, you know different backgrounds. Because when you're home you like satisfied, you only seeing that. But when you at school... I went to I'm not going to say PWI because I don't think it was called that back then... it was a mixture. So you just got to see diversity.

In high school, Ronnie maintained good grades and participated in extracurricular activities. Reflecting on his high school years, he stated:

My grades in high school was B to As. By my senior year, it was all As. I ran track my freshmen year, Tennis ninth, tenth, eleventh, Band fifth grade to high school to college. I did FBLA and was president of the Interact Club. I was on

homecoming court my eleventh, twelfth, Prom court twelfth. Senior superlative best all around, most likely to be successful and best smile. So like I stated when I got to high school I was really noticed and I became popular. That kind of helped me grow as an individual as well.

Ronnie also attributed success at school to his teachers and counselors. He asserted, “They were phenomenal especially when I got to twelfth grade. They made sure I got the knowledge I needed to be able to move on to college.” Ronnie recalled his favorite teacher in high school. He reflected on how much admiration he had for his teacher:

The teacher in high school that I admired the most has to be, I’m going to go with Mr. D. He was my anatomy teacher. And I loved anatomy. He made sure that I understood the different type of bones, everything that went along with it. That’s what I had wanted to be a physical therapist because of my high school teacher.

For the most part, Ronnie had a positive experience in high school. He was involved in several extracurricular activities and built strong relationships with friends and teachers. Ronnie conveyed, “That’s what I really enjoyed the most. Being around my friends then, being able to have conversations... being able to talk to my teachers and finally being able to really trust them.”

Having attended a HBCU for nearly 4 years, Ronnie is now a looking forward to graduating. Reflecting back, he acknowledged the challenges posed during his freshmen year. He admitted:

It was a transition time. [A] time when I doubted myself, should I be here, should I not, should I leave. I often questioned myself what was my purpose here. Why

am I here? As you know I am the first one to go to college and that had a big factor in it as well. Am I going to make it? But I had to tell myself every day, you are great, you're a warrior, and you're more than a conqueror, most of all you're a king.

As a mature student, Ronnie learned how cooperation with faculty and administration is critical to success in college. He admitted, "... it [interactions] has been a positive experience." Now a senior, Ronnie knows the benefits of building positive relationships. He shared, "I'm just very grateful and thankful for the support that I do have in college... not only friends, family, classmates, but administration as well." Ronnie's experience in college has been good thus far. He acknowledged that college success "has been a living and learning experience."

Bobby

Bobby is a FGAA student from a small city in Georgia. He is a senior Business Management major attending a HBCU. Bobby was raised in a single parent household with his brother and sister. Bobby's childhood was influenced by a number of factors. His grandmother was instrumental in his spiritual growth. He stated, "My grandmother was the one who started me going to church and what not." His guidance counselor provided the "male perspective" and was "... an influential person in [his] life." Further, Bobby's FBLA teacher exposed him to other organizations outside his home and school. He shared, "She was always introducing me to new things whether it was conferences or organization or trips or whatever the situation was. She was always making sure that I had the opportunity to go or participate."

Although Bobby attended schools with gang activity, he never experienced major issues with his teachers. His relationships with teachers were always good and he never got into disciplinary problems. He stated, “You know like fights and disrespect and all that good stuff. But it didn’t have an effect on me. Most of the times I tried to help others overcome their situations.” Bobby was a social butterfly who interacted with many people at the school. He shared the following anecdote about his life at school:

I enjoyed just being around other people. You know socializing and getting to interact with them. I liked that aspect. Also I had great relationships with my teachers, particularly Ms. Johnson and Mr. Benson. They both encouraged me on a daily basis to do my best.

Bobby felt pressured to do well in school and be a role model for his younger siblings, nieces and cousins. He shared:

So like of course people are looking up to you so it’s better for you to be on a certain level so you don’t want to let them down because you know their expectations of you. And then at the same time you got your younger siblings looking up to you and you just want to make sure that you show them right... and you know stuff like that.

Bobby also revealed his cousins “looked up” to him growing up. “I was always that big cousin pushing them to go to school, do your homework, get your grades in.” Likewise, he had a close relationship with his mom and siblings. Bobby shared, “We were close. I can talk to them about whatever was going on.” He recognized early in life the benefit of a network of close family relationships. Bobby stated, “... when they [family] see me... it motivates and encourages me to go on.”

As a student from a low-income family, Bobby reflected on his childhood community. “The community... was ok. Of course you have problems but [it] wasn’t any severe situations or anything like that.” He attended church in his community on a regular basis. He echoed, “... church on Sunday, Tuesday, [and] Thursday.” Bobby credits his grandmother for inspiring him to attend church. He shared, “... really just my grandmother. She was the one who started getting me going to church.” In addition to his grandmother, Bobby acknowledged an influential male figure in his life. He purported:

I would probably say my guidance counselor. He was just always instilling in me, you know, reach for the limits. He always told me he saw greatness within me. He never wanted me to give up. He was always pushing me to go above and beyond and to be persistent.

Although Bobby was born and raised in a low-income family, he made ends meet financially. As he put it, they “didn’t go without.” He explained:

So I wouldn’t say it was easy, but it wasn’t hard. We didn’t go without but it was like at times where I felt like I could have had more. At one point, I guess I was spoiled because like I said I was an only child up until like 8 until my little brother. But even after then I still got what I wanted most of the time so I guess you can say I was spoiled.

Despite his upbringing, Bobby possessed the determination and initiative to do things on his own.

Bobby received good grades in elementary and middle school – made A’s and B’s. He was active in extracurricular activities. He revealed:

In elementary school I did spelling bee and 4H. I didn't have any major positions in there but I was exposed to it. In middle school opportunities opened up more.

I joined a program with the city. It was called Junior Marshalls Program.

Basically it was a program where we partnered with the Marshalls department and they just came...we helped...they came to every middle school and we would just try to erase the problems or tensions that we was facing during our ages. I served as the president of that organization during middle school. Outside of that, I didn't do any sports in middle school, so I always tried to do like leadership organizations, things like that.

Bobby enjoyed the social side of elementary and middle school. He stated, "I think it was just being around other people. You know socializing and getting to interact with them. I liked that aspect." However, Bobby never had strong friendship bonds with specific individuals. He stated, "See I never really had [a friend]... I don't think I would call anybody my friend because I was always talking to so many different people. I really never had solid connections with just any one person." Bobby doesn't regret his missed opportunity; having enjoyed his school experiences prior to high school.

At first, Bobby attended his local high school but was later transferred to a vocational school. He revealed,

I went there to be a part of the health care department that they have there but I ended up switching over to business management. The school itself, like I said, in the area was a little gang violence and drug and substance abuse, so of course we would see like some of the faces in the school.

This new environment was very different from his previous surroundings. Bobby was also involved in extracurricular activities. He stated, "... I was in SGA, FBLA, just different organizations that would help build my leadership skills." After he completed high school, Bobby transitioned to college where he complained about having limited interactions with faculty and administration. He stated:

So really the only time I really interacted with my advisors was when it came time to register for classes. I felt my interactions with them [faculty]... I didn't really go to their offices but once in a while I would see them on campus, I can hold a conversation with them and just be myself.

As a college student, Bobby is active in campus extracurricular activities and serves as president of the Collegiate 100 organization. He attributed this to skills gained while serving in this role. He expressed:

I would say those I spent with Collegiate 100. They're introducing me to different people in the community, different leadership opportunities where I got to speak and hear others and just like that they encourage me. And being around my brothers and trying to be successful... we just motivate each other.

Bobby also credits the freshmen academy as a great resource on campus. He stated, "Just being around those students who had the same ideals or goals as me... to come to college and be successful. So you know with us being able to interact with each other." Bobby is pleased with his decision to attend a HBCU. He conveyed, "Even though I never really had nobody to tell me that they didn't see me coming to college or that I wouldn't be successful... I still say, look at me now. I'm not the best but I'm here." Bobby shared powerful advice to aspiring FGAA male students:

First off definitely just make sure you find your balance. College is about having fun but at the same time it's about working. So find that balance where you can make sure your work is done but you still can have a social life and be able to grow and develop as a young black male.

After graduation, Bobby plans on finding a job. He also wants to attend graduate school.

Ricky

Ricky is a FGAA male student from a small city in Georgia. He is a senior Electronics Engineer major attending a HBCU. Ricky and two younger siblings were raised by a single mother. He stated, "We're very close." Ricky's mother was 17 years old when he was born and did not have means to support him. His grandmother, the church and school played a significant part in his upbringing. He shared, "I'm close with my grandma. My grandad he passed away when I was younger. She practically raised me." Ironically, the church provided a safety net for Ricky. He reminisced, "Church was good. My grandma always instilled this into me ... She always gave us a word from the Bible."

Young Ricky was inspired by others to do well in school. For example, his middle school math teacher was a source of encouragement and "... was like a mother. She broke me down at the door and she'd build me back up." On the other hand, his school coach was like a father who "... gave [him] the opportunity to be in a leadership position. He was just that role model as a father that [he] didn't grow up with."

Growing up Ricky was at risk of dropping out of school. He blamed most of his childhood hardships on his "impoverished and unsafe ... bad environment.... with rough necks" and consequent bad behavior in middle school. He recalled his struggles:

Middle school I was very bad. I was just hanging with the wrong crowd you know, like I was just doing a lot to fit in with the ghetto boys. I just wanted to be cool. I was just being bad just to fit in... like being a class clown... making a fool of my mom. I [was] retained in the sixth grade twice. Then I went to the seventh grade. I played football the seventh grade. I started acting a little better. I did half of the seventh grade and then I got skipped to the eighth grade.

As Ricky progressed into middle school, he spent most of his free time doing extracurricular activities and was able to stay out of trouble. He "...played all sports. I played everything." Ricky's involvement in the school's football program helped him turn his life around. The following anecdote neatly captures this sentiment:

As I entered ninth grade I was pretty bad. I just was all into the girls. I was all about girls and looking good. I was on the football team. Once I got that role of being that starting quarterback I knew it came with leadership. So I had to lead by example. I used to have one on one talks with my principal. He used to just tell me go be something, this is an opportunity to get away from here... to go be better.

With guidance from the principal, Ricky learned how to choose good friends.

Ricky reflected on his principal's advice on his choice of friends:

My principal once told me ... to hang with assets and not liabilities. Ever since he told me that I try to get somebody... I become friends with the people that I feel like can be an asset in my life. They can teach me something. We can teach each other.

Ricky participated in several organizations on campus including his service as the treasurer of the National Society of Black Engineer (NSBE), and a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Collegiate 100. Ricky believes membership to these organizations has contributed to his success thus far. Ricky recalled:

Just joining organizations... the most effective one is Collegiate 100. It's a lot of good men in there. They have other leadership opportunities and other organizations so you can learn... you learn new things every day so just being around guys you can learn from... that have the experience to share.

As he prepares to graduate, Ricky reflects on the best part about attending an HBCU. He explained:

The college... my colleagues... the advisors. You know everything about an HBCU everybody wants to see you be successful. If they can see it in you and you see it in yourself, they going to make sure....they pushing for you to strive to be a college graduate.

The burden of being the first to attend college inspired Ricky to represent his family well in college. His sentiments are neatly captured in the following anecdote:

I'm just going to be so overwhelmed, not having much support as I did when I first started. Not knowing I was going to graduate from college. Just coming from where I come from. I'll be the first generation; everybody will be looking up to me. Everybody who said I wasn't going to do it or it wasn't possible. You know just to be smiling. It just will be an overwhelming moment.

Mike

Mike is a FGAA Performing Arts major male student from a small city in Georgia. As a youth, Mike was raised by his mother in a low-income single parent household. He regretted not having a father figure in his family. He reflected, “It [family household] started off with my mom, father, and sister. It ended with just my mom, sister and me.” Mike was very close to his mother and attributed his educational successes to his mother’s motivation and insistence to pursue education. He stated:

Just seeing her doing all that she can for me and my sister and how strongly ambitious she was, you know, to help us and get what we needed. It gave me a little something to look up to and I can piggy back off of as a man.

Mike’s mother was his greatest cheerleader. He explained, “Even if I decided not to go [college], she was going to force me to go anyway. So yeah, she felt great about it.” She also valued education. “My mother pushed me the most because she understood you got to get an education in order to be successful, in order to not struggle and be in predicaments.” She also instilled a strong sense of responsibility into her son and taught him what it meant to be a good man who “provides for your family so an education would be the best thing you can have under your belt.” Mike was also driven to excel in school by a strong sense of self-efficacy. He shared, “when it comes to work I’ve always known how to apply myself. I mean I’m not the smartest dude in the room but I know how to get the job done.”

Mike struggled with some teachers who insisted he was never good enough to amount to anything. He shared the following anecdote about one of his teachers: “Ms. Jones ... told me I really couldn’t go to a four year college but I always had a 3.0 so I don’t know why she said that. But I’m here today..... Yeah, Ms. Jones so shout out to

her.” While in high school, Mike increasingly became conscious of issues of race and racism. He stated:

Probably what I didn’t like about high school is sometimes when you’re in a predominately white school in the South there’s a lot of racism going on you know... so you got to really be careful how you move with racism out there.

There were always parental hardships present in his life. “I’m closer to those two [mother and sister] than I am to my dad because he wasn’t there.” For moral support and guidance, Mike connected with friends and family in his community. He shared, “It’s [community] very small... everyone knows everyone so basically it’s a big community of family.”

Mike’s mother as a spiritual leader inspired him to value Christianity. Thus, from an early age Mike attended church services regularly and sang in the local church choir. He asserted, “I did attend church... it was my first love ... I use to sing in church.” Having found this new love, he still sings in church when he returns home to visit. Mike’s mother continued to serve as his moral compass. He reflected, “Just seeing her [mother] doing all that she can for me and my sister and how strongly ambitious she was to, you know, help us and get what we needed.” Although his mother was morally supportive, Mike’s family struggled financially. He expressed about his family’s financial situation, “...definitely a struggle [financially], still struggling at the moment. Yeah, definitely a struggle but we knew how to survive.”

In elementary and middle school, Mike behaved like a clown to attract attention from peers and teachers. He acted out inappropriately most of the time and “... was a pretty bad kid... not like a bully bad kid... just like a class clown ... wanted to make

everybody laugh.” This behavior got him into trouble with some of his teachers. Ms. Smith was annoyed with the behavior and did not expect him to make it to high school nor college. He stated, “She [Ms. Smith] didn’t believe I had the potential to stay in school... based on the way I behaved.” Triumphantly, Mike went on to appreciate the motivation that Ms. Smith inadvertently passed his way.

Mike turned around and performed better in high school. He noted, “Grades ... were good ... played football and basketball and sung in the chorus ... did a couple of drama things... was pretty popular.” Relationships with his teachers improved. Unlike Ms. Jones, Mike admired his high school English teacher. He stated, “I’m not big on English but I loved her class.” He felt the positive interactions with his high school teachers were meaningful and beneficial. Mike asserted, “I enjoyed, like I said, the teachers. The teachers were great.” Moreover, he also believed high school prepared him for college. Mike stated, “I think it prepared me for college. They have high expectations at my school and a lot of help if you need help in going to the next level. So, yeah, those people push you there.”

In college, Mike continued to excel academically and socially. He maintained a 3.2 GPA and is involved in extracurricular activities on campus. Mike accredited his personal strength as the driver to his college success. He stated, “...personal strength... my faith in God first. And just knowing and believing in myself, that I can do all things.” Mike enjoys being a FGAA male student at a HBCU. He expressed, “It’s awesome. It’s pretty awesome. Give people behind me, younger than me to look up and want to follow. And we can have more successful black men.” Mike also recognized, in hindsight, what motivates him to strive for success in college. He explained, “Well, like I said, I grew up

with my mother and my sister so, yeah, they motivate me. I just try to make them happy, being proud and stuff, of me.” Mike now hopes to move on and graduate from college. He expressed, “I will feel like a new person... great and proud. I will have accomplished something no one in my family has ever done. And it’s an honor.”

Johnny

Johnny is a FGAA male senior Mass Communication major from a small town in California. He was raised by his mother in a single parent household with seven sisters and one brother. Throughout his childhood, Johnny and his family moved frequently. He reflected, “... we moved a lot so I would transition from California to the U.S. Virgin Islands to Georgia.” At the age of 12, Johnny finally met his estranged father. Despite meeting his father, he was not close to his family and often regarded himself as “the lone wolf.” Johnny believes this lack of close family ties may have contributed his low self-concept throughout middle school. He reflected on his childhood:

I kind of remember being like the ugly duckling not really wanting to accept the less attractive girls but wanting the more attractive ones but not being able to fit into that bracket of what they’re looking for. So [I] had a lot of self-confidence issues.

Low self-confidence led to poor performance at school and reckless behavior which landed him in a slew of behavioral problems. He stated, “I had pretty poor grades Cs and Ds.” The following anecdote captures these problems:

I started to heavily get involved in criminal activity. I actually started smoking tobacco by the time I was in middle school. I kind of started feeling like I was grown... I felt like I’d done it all. I’ve driven a car. I’ve smoked a cigarette, weed.

I've done everything that I felt like any other grown person had done... getting into a lot of trouble and struggling with my identity.

One thing led to another and soon Johnny was consumed in serious delinquent behavior. He shared, "... like gangs and the wrong thing to do really started to take over [my] life in ninth grade." Inevitably these gang activities led to more serious problems including school suspensions and incarceration. Clearly Johnny was at serious risk of dropping out of school.

Johnny believed that other social networks such as his church, extended family, and school teachers and school counselors stepped in to save him from himself. He credited his grandmother for introducing him to Catholic and Baptist Christian doctrines. This allowed Johnny to realize good from bad and put him on a more positive life trajectory. His mother removed him from the public school based on his bad behavior. Later he was enrolled into a different public school. He revealed about his behavior in school:

Most of the schools [I] attended, I got suspended a lot. When I wasn't suspended [externally], I had in school suspension. I got expelled a couple times from school for bringing weapons and starting riots, a couple different things.

Johnny was an avid member of ROTC and the Kappa League. He shared:

My inspiration was not only ROTC; it was actually Kappa league as well. We had a Kappa League. It was in Stone Mountain which does a lot in the Atlanta area. They just so happen to come out at the same time as stomp the yard movie so...it was a very, fully functional Kappa League.

Johnny felt his road to recovery was sometimes made difficult by teachers with very low expectation of him. He reflected on one incident in which one football coach laughed at him for seriously considering playing football. He shared:

I was on the football team at the time, and [I] said that I wanted to play football for either USC or Michigan University and the lady burst out laughing. He pulled up the stuff [information] for Michigan University, USC, and said "... no matter if you get all A's from here on out, which you probably won't do, you will never get into any of these colleges let alone anything relatively similar."

Not all was bad for Johnny. Jonny was determined to be self-sufficient and get a job at an early age so he would not be dependent on his mother for material things. He stated:

I got a job and nobody ever purchased anything for me ever again. From there on out I really ended up becoming independent. I bought all my cell phones. I've owned three cars that I've paid for. I paid my phone bill, video games, TVs, etc. He recalled having limited childhood friends. "I had two close childhood friends that I can really remember. Again because we moved around those were the only ones that I stuck around with long enough." Johnny attended church regularly. He stated, "Yea I come from a very religious family... a long line of preachers and bishops and pastors. I would say, growing up until the age around 16 or 17, church was a mandatory thing once if not two, [or] three times a week." Although Johnny had a spiritual foundation, he admitted, "... no one single person [influenced his life] growing up." "I grew up really fast because of moving a lot... I immediately realized how to pick up the good and bad from each person and take that and build it into yourself." From a financial standpoint,

Johnny's family was challenged. He revealed, "...we were definitely in the lower income bracket. I will say that we always struggled financially."

In middle school, Johnny experienced self-confidence issues. He described the feeling of being the ugly duckling. He shared, "I never wanted to accept the less attractive girls but wanted the more attractive ones. However, not being able to fit into that bracket of what they were looking for." Johnny admitted this was his perceived issue which, led to troublesome behavior. He reflected, "I do remember that I started to heavily get involved in criminal activity. I actually started smoking tobacco by the time I was in middle school." The delinquent behaviors resulted in "pretty poor grades [Cs and Ds]." He blamed all his woes on poor parental guidance and support.

Further, Johnny admitted, "High school was like a virtual roller coaster." He remembered "coming in freshmen year and the gangs and criminal activity was at an all-time high. It was to the point where my parents feared for my life." Eventually, the community saved Johnny from the destructive path. He conceded, "I had one foot in ROTC essentially and the other foot in gangs and everything else that was poor." To salvage his high school career, Johnny started to make good decisions that yielded him a path to college. Interestingly, he framed his high school experiences as life lessons. He shared, "At that point [senior year in high school] I knew I wanted to go to college...a first generation, I knew I would be the first."

Johnny holds a 3.1 GPA and is active in extracurricular activities on campus including being president of his fraternity and chairman of a male empowerment organization. He accredited "perseverance" as his primary personal strength in regards to success in college. Further, Johnny enjoys the relationship and engagement opportunities

he has with friends, faculty, and administration in college. “I think I would [have] exposed myself to a college campus sooner. I can’t say that would have made a difference but I know that it did make a difference once I finally did experience it.” Regarding his future plans, Johnny stated, “I’m confident that I’m going to get a good job and I’m confident that I’m going to get in a master’s program.”

Summary

In this chapter I have provided insight into the precollege and college experiences of the study participants. The findings show the FGAA male students are succeeding both academically and socially. It was through their experiences they became motivated to persist in college. As the participants progressed in college, they began to reflect on what contributed to their success. In the Chapter 5, I describe the major themes that emerged from the data in response to the research questions.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION OF THEMES

This chapter provides the finding and themes which emerged during the data analysis process. The process involved careful and continuous review of audio recordings, interview transcripts and document analysis. Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method was utilized to analyze data. This method was particularly useful with interpreting audio files, interview transcripts and documents. Findings from this study were mainly drawn from interviews conducted with six FGAA male students attending a HBCU which focused on their lived experiences.

Participant interviews were conducted face-to-face on campus. Afterwards, interview transcripts were compared for similarities and differences throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Documents reviewed included university policy statements, institutional publications, literature from each of the deans' colleges, and participant's institutional records. A list of codes was developed from reviewed interview transcripts and documents. The preliminary list of codes included the following: childhood communities and relationships, pre-college experiences, support networks, impact of being FG students, college environment, relationships with faculty and staff, and extracurricular activities.

Initial codes were linked into categories which illustrated relationships. Ultimately data from the study was consolidated into three themes: community and

family influences on educational goals, responding productively to racism, FG students reinventing themselves. Participants' pre-college community and family relationships, which included support networks, were grouped together to form the community and family influences on educational goals theme. Concepts on racial stereotyping in middle and high school were all consolidated under the responding productively to racism theme. The final theme reflected on how the FGAA male students reinvented themselves in college. Table 4 presents the emerging themes supported by the participants' sample interview excerpts.

Table 4

FG Students Themes Matrix

Themes	Participants	Supporting Interview E
Community and Family Influences on Educational Goals	Ronnie	She was my favorite teacher [Ms. D.] because she pushed me to keep going. When no one else believed in me, she did. I pushed so hard today to prove to people I'm going to be successful. She [mother] wanted us to attend college. She's very supportive.
	Bobby	He [guidance counselor] always told me he saw greatness within me. He never wanted me to give up. He was always pushing me to go above and beyond and to be persistent. A lot of my cousins they look up to me and so they want to make sure they have someone

they can look up to and follow my steps.

Mike

They [teachers] have high expectations at my school and a lot of help if you need help in going to the next level. So, yeah, those people push you there. She [mother] has pushed me the most because she understands that you got to get an education in order to be successful, in order to not struggle and be in predicaments.

Responding
Productively to
Racism

Ronnie

It [racism] hurt me so that's why I pushed so hard today to prove to people I'm going to be successful.

Bobby

At some point, I had to decide what was morally important to me. It was apparent that racism was systematic at my school.

Mike

It [racial acts] gave me a little something to reflect on. You always find ways to overcome things, that's part of life for AA males.

Johnny

I've always had people tell me what I'm not going to do which has actually got me to where I am now. I use negativity as a motivator.

FG Student
Reinventing
Themselves

Ralph

I think the biggest change was in my social skills.

	Being able to adapt and adjust to various types of people and just overall being an open and tolerable person. And also my willingness to learn. Not really ever limiting myself or conforming.
Bobby	I was always trying to talk to different people. So I had no problem being able to interact with them.
Mike	I was excited to enter college and gain the opportunity to better myself. The first thing I did was become a more open minded person. It's helping me network.
Johnny	I understand that college is all about growth. There is a time and a place for everything. This is all a growing process which has been my major strength throughout college.

Note. These serve as extracts of the themes that emerged from the study.

Theme I: Community and Family Influences on Educational Goals

Analysis of community and family influences on FG students is important for understanding the complex experiences of FG students as it pertains to college success. The influence of community and family on educational attainment has been well demonstrated and replicated (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005). The researcher in the current study found a direct influence of family and neighborhood factors on FGAA male college student's educational aspirations, and college success.

The researcher found FG students heavily rely on families and the larger community to be successful in college.

Participants reported mixed influences of community and family on their educational experiences. Although all participants were burdened by being the first to go to college in their families, they reported mostly positive influence from families and the community at large. As a result, students expressed how family, friends, teachers and other communal figures influenced their decision to attend college.

Family Influence

Family members were influential in the lives of the participants. Despite their own lack of college experience, they encouraged the participants to pursue higher education. Of the six participants interviewed, all came from low-income single parent households. Regardless of their circumstances, participants reported their family strongly influenced them to attend college. Mike's mother was aware of the importance of a college education as a means to escape from pervasive poverty and other social issues bedeviling AA men. Mike shared, "My mother has pushed me the most because she understands that you got to get an education in order to be successful. As a man you got to provide for your future family so an education is key."

Ronnie's grandmother was his biggest cheer leader who tried to instill Christian values to give him a strong moral compass to guide him as a young man. His grandmother taught him resilience and perseverance and frequently urged him: "don't give up, rise up." Ronnie's mother was a role model and a source of constant encouragement and a forceful influence in his aspiration to obtain a college degree. He explained:

She [his mother] always wanted us to attend college...all of her children. ...

However I was the first to go. She always said if she could go back she would.

She's like, she's 40 now and she's working on her GED. She pushed us to try for better.

Bobby carried the burden of being the first to go to college in his family as the entire family looked up to him to pave the way for others to follow. Bobby revealed how "cousins and siblings" instilled in him a desire to obtain a degree. He shared, "...they kind of looked up to me. I value education." Ultimately, Bobby gave in to this pressure and became serious about his educational efforts to obtain a college education. Bobby shared his struggle of being the first in his family to pursue a degree:

It kind of has its drawbacks and it has its advantages and what not. So like of course people are looking up to you so it's better for you to be on a certain level so you don't want to let them down because you know their expectations of you. And then at the same time you got your younger siblings looking up to you and you just want to make sure that you show them right, you know stuff like that.

Johnny shared a similar struggle representing his family as the first one to go to college:

I still wanted to pledge a fraternity but I had to drop because I needed to be that person in the family to graduate. There is nobody in my family like that. There are things that I do...that I wanted to do anyways but I am too stubborn to not do it because somebody needs to set the standard even if everybody else shoots for the stars after this.

Ricky's, Ronnie's and Johnny's mothers believed in their sons' potential to graduate from college regardless of their behavioral issues which frequently got them bad

grades and suspensions from school. Ricky admitted, “I used to get suspended a lot.” His mother’s conviction about his educational abilities and football talent and subsequent college invitations helped him into believing in himself. He recalled:

I was getting letters. I went to camp so I was getting letters from like Auburn all these big schools. I was like I want to go there. All I was thinking was football, football. I forgot about the education part. I just told my mom I want to go to Auburn I want to go to Auburn. And she was just very supportive like you can do it, you can do it.

Ronnie expressed gratitude to family for their steadfast confidence and support. He shared:

It’s an amazing feeling. College has taught me a lot. I’ve grown as a man. Everyone looks up to me, you know. Most people didn’t see me going as far because of my past but I did a whole 360.

Johnny’s mother felt a void in his life created by the absence of his father. She was grateful for the male figures stepping in to help Johnny at school. He reflected:

I remember calling my ROTC advisor and my Kappa league advisor crying and telling them how much she appreciates their help because they sort of were the father figure that I lacked and that she.....basically that out of all the stuff that I drug her through that there’s hope. There’s still a good kid in there somewhere.

Ralph was the only participant to report family support only from a distant aunt who allowed him to live with her and taught him “household etiquette.” However, lack of family support gave him an edge over his peers. This gave him incentive to mobilize support from friends. He shared the following anecdote to illustrate this point:

Actually I am not close with my family at all....well, I am not family oriented. My family is very close to me but we don't have a personal relationship. I guess primarily when I was younger I was always some way different from my family. I used to be considered like the black sheep, so I never really built that relationship or that commonality outside of blood. So I was always friend oriented growing up. My friends happen to be my biggest supporters as opposed to my family.

Community Influence

This theme illustrates how entire communities converged to help these FGAA male students go to college as the adage goes "it takes a village to educate a child." All participants had special motivational relationships with church leaders and school faculty and administrators which helped in their trajectories to college. The church leaders provided a unique context for the participants to engage in social experiences that taught values and encouraged them to make moral decisions. Johnson (2000) believed children could learn to be moral. Participants in this study found the church as an opportune place to develop this skill. Through his local church choir Mike found his voice and developed moral compass and determination to go to college. He shared his feelings about church:

I attended church, it was one of my first loves. My mother is an assistant minister, by the way so, I was always in church. I'm also a singer so I use to sing in the church as well. I love going to and singing in church. It inspired me to do something great with my life.

Most of the participants were affiliated with multiple church associations. Bobby and Johnny spoke positively about attending Bible study. Similar Ricky shared his experiences being involved with youth programs at his church. He stated, "Being a role

model to the youth is important to me.” These affiliations at church provided avenues of opportunities for the young men to find their voice and develop a moral compass for adulthood.

For Mike, his small closely knit neighborhood provided the basic sense of belonging (O’Keeffe, 2013). This gave him value in life and in coping with broken family painful emotions. Mike described the specific nature of his community, “It’s very small. So, everyone knows everyone so basically it’s a big community of family. You basically go down the street and all your cousins live down the same street, so therefore they are real small and family oriented.”

Specifically, Ralph found valuable support from his middle school teacher. He reflected, “...she believed in me. She actually allowed me to recognize my scholastic ability.” Similar, Ralph spoke about another AA teacher that awakened his sense of identity and purpose as a Black man. He shared:

He would always drop knowledge about black history and how important it was to value our culture but from where I’m from it’s more so of...., it pushes you to perform. You should do this and you should do that, he always encouraged us to think outside of the box. At the time I thought it was crazy but I love his passion, I couldn’t really understand why he wanted us to be so pro black because I had never really heard of pro black before. So from there he introduced me into that and then when I came here I was able to reflect on what he actually taught me.

Ricky credited his high school principal, coach and counselor for inspiring him to achieve higher educational goals for college. He reflected on his principal’s motivational role and

stated, “He used to just tell me go be something, this is an opportunity to get away from here, to go be better, stop getting suspended. I used to get suspended a lot.”

His advisor took on a fatherly role. He articulated:

They tried to be our parents when we were not at home with our parents...telling us about life. They always preached go to college. You know go to college. They advised to us from freshmen year to senior year. We always had advisement when our grades were bad.

His high school coach helped him see the value of education. He stated:

He saw something in me that I didn't see in myself and he got it out of me. He gave me the opportunity to be in a leadership position. Coach L was just that role model as a father that I didn't grow up with.

Bobby found encouragement and support from his guidance counselor. He revealed, “My guidance counselor was very influential in my life.” As a prominent figure in his community, he was a major source of support for Bobby. He explained:

He was just always instilling in me, you know, reach for the limits. He always told me he saw greatness within me. He never wanted me to give up. He was always pushing me to go above and beyond and to be persistent.

Johnny's and Ralph's lack of community support revealed a negative influence of community. On one hand, Johnny was moved many times by his parents and did not identify with any particular community. He shared:

It was to the point where my parents feared for my life. I didn't know why I didn't at that point. It was like gangs and the wrong thing to do really start to take over my life... I did get into a lot of trouble.

One high school counselor consequently expressed very low expectations for him. He recalled this counselor telling him, “You’ll never get into any colleges.” Instead of giving up to such stereotype, he felt motivated by her to prove his counselor wrong. He stated:

Every time I would not do my work my mom would close my door and talk to me quietly and said there’s a lady that used to work at your school who told me that you barely would even make it into community college, somebody needs to prove her wrong. That would easily be what I needed to get done. I’ve always had people tell me what I’m not going to do which has actually got me to where I am now.

On the other hand, Ralph blamed his impoverished community for his struggles. He stated, “For the beginning half of my life I stayed in an inner city low income neighborhood. I was able to recognize, I guess, circumstances of the communities that I used to live in.” Despite the hardship of his environment, Ralph was supported and encouraged by his neighborhood friend. He admits his friend has always “been one of my largest supporters.” Ralph also received support and guidance from his middle school teacher. He explained, “I appreciate my middle school English teacher. She would always make the extra effort to ensure I understood my work. My teacher supported me beyond academics. She was always there for me. That helped inspire me.”

Ralph was certainly not alone. Other participants also found inspiration and guidance from members of their community. Ronnie described his childhood neighborhood as “ghetto.” Like the other participants, he was raised in a low income single parent household. From his community, he credits his middle school teacher with

being the “voice.” He explained, “She was my favorite teacher because she pushed me to keep going. When no one else believed in me, she did.” Further, Ronnie acknowledged the encouragement received from his teachers and counselors in high school. He shared, “They were phenomenal especially when I got to twelfth grade. They made sure that I got the knowledge that I needed to be able to move on to college.” Ronnie described the support and guidance he received from members of his community as “amazing.” He had this to say about the impact of his youth minister:

The person who pushed me the most would have to be, he was our youth minister in music. His name is J. He’s an alumnus from a HBCU and he was in band. He was a drum major...same things that I did in high school. However different high schools and he kind of just talked to me about talked to me about it talked to me about it. Eventually I applied because I got tired of him nagging me about it. I knew I wanted to go somewhere. When I applied and got accepted I thank him to this day for pushing me to attend an HBCU.

Theme II: Responding Productively to Racism

This theme reflects racial tension FGAA male students experienced from their precollege years and the influence it had in college. Goff et al. (2014) in support of this report suggested people often see Black boys through negative lenses — and those boys can suffer the consequences. This theme is also supported by Astin’s (1984) theory of Student Involvement which asserted that prior college experiences students bring with them into college influences their college lives and in turn their academic progress. Participants brought the baggage of racial discrimination, poverty, single family homes

into college. Being FGAA male students, they struggled to be proud of themselves and their race, while trying to adapt to the college environment.

Johnny stated, “It [college] was a struggle from the beginning. My first year was plagued with reminiscence from my precollege life.” Bobby related, “College life was a huge adjustment. If it wasn’t for my experiences prior to college, I would have never had the strength and endurance to stay the course.” Mike admitted experiencing discrimination from his white college professor. He stated, “AA males don’t typically do well in college.” Astin’s (1984) and Bean’s (1980) models explain how students’ backgrounds influence their success in college. Because of their FG background, it was perceived these students would struggle in college. Ricky, Mike, and Bobby reported significant internal tensions — over their cultural identity and their desire to acclimate. Mike shared, “I often felt the pressure of navigating a racially politicized environment.”

Ronnie and Ralph cited concerns about how one white high school teacher often singled them out in class on the basis of his race. Ronnie shared:

What I disliked about high school was the senseless acts of racism. When you’re in a predominately white school in the south, there’s a huge racial climate. Most of my white teachers display a tremendous amount of racial bias that nearly destroyed my interest in school. This prejudice was hurtful and made me feel alone and isolated.

Ralph stated:

My AP calculus teacher noticed that I had tattoos. As a young black male, I guess she couldn’t fathom that I was in her AP calculus class so she gave me a really hard time. She would always pick on me throughout the class and allow

other students to do the same. Throughout her class session, she would just chastise me.

Bobby, Ricky, and Ralph reported other teachers having low educational expectations of them compared to their white peers. Bobby lamented:

My entire class failed an exam. The teacher wanted to talk with us individually. I overheard the conversation of the white student in front of me. He [my teacher] told her not to be concerned about her score and invited her to tutorials. He was very supportive and encouraging. When it was my turn, he was not as supported and suggested that I withdraw from the class. Never once did he offer me tutorial or encourage me to stay in his class. However, I did stay and eventually passed his class.

Along the same vein Ricky stated:

Because I was a FGAA male student, they assumed that I would not go far in life. They watched negative stereotypical images of AA on television and generalized those images with all AA culture. I felt my teachers didn't expect for me to attend college because a lot of them stereotype me as an AA male.

Similarly, Ralph reported, "Since I grew up in a low income single parent home, my teachers had low expectations of me succeeding in life." Bobby shared:

I attended Wiley High School. It was mostly an all-white school and I was involved in a lot of extracurricular activities. Mainly sports as I played both basketball and football. The teams at the school consisted of students from both ethnic groups. However the coaches believed AA preferred to play basketball and football. Based on stereotypes, they assumed AA was better athletes.

Some participants turned this negative situation around and gave themselves better chances to succeed. Regardless of these challenges, the participants refused to be held to a lower standard. They understood stereotypes are unfair and ethically bias but the stereotypes did not divert them from obtaining their educational goals. Johnny asserted:

My disadvantage tends to be my advantage. I believe they shaped me into the person I am today. If I was one of my white peers, my experience would have been entirely different. But I realized that these racial barriers were put in place to make me stronger and more resilient.

Ricky complained of being forced to speak for all Black people. He recalled:

[The teacher] asked a question in regards to black history to the class. I raised my hand to answer and I was correct. He said he wasn't surprised that I knew the answer to his question. Based on his comment, and being one of the few AA in his class, I felt insulted and demoralized. So, for his class, it motivated me to stay the course. At the end of the semester, I did very well.

Regular confrontation with racism and stereotypes impacted the participants' relationships with their high school teachers and peers. Some of the participants described feeling "suppressed by whiteness" because of being the minority in a school dominated by white culture. Likewise, the presence of white culture presented relationship challenges and posed conflicts to their cultural identity. Mike expressed how he felt in regards to his relationship with his teachers and peers in high school. He explained:

Being an AA male, it was hard for me to build relationships with my teachers and peers in high school. I wanted respect from everyone, no matter my skin color or ethnic background. [My teachers] didn't expect much from me. I wasn't going to assimilate with my peers to get known. Basically, I wasn't going to "play the game" to gain friends and build relationships. Nor was I going to obscure my cultural identity to promote favor.

Ralph mentioned his reluctance to develop relationships because of the white culture that existed at his high school. He reflected:

Basically I didn't socialize much with my teachers and fellow students. I chose to focus on my work and not get sidetracked by the racially charged culture at my school. It was obvious that my several of my white teachers and peers didn't want to see me succeed and better myself. It wasn't just me but I felt similar sentiments for all the AA students attending the school.

Most participants believed race was a barrier, especially if you are an AA male. "It was difficult to establish relationships with teachers and [peers] classmates because of how they see you" one participant stated. Further he shared:

... some teachers assume you're a failure once you enter their classrooms. So therefore, as an AA student, you have to show that you can be successful in their class. You have to prove that you can learn on the same level as your white counterparts. It was obvious that teachers compared you to others [white students] regardless of your individual accomplishments.

On the contrary, some of the participants reported having built some positive relationships with their white teachers and peers. They distinctly revealed positive

relationships were formed with those individuals that were openly receptive to their culture. Ricky expanded on this point:

Not all of my white teachers were distance and unapproachable. Some of them realized that there are different life views, approaches, and ways of thinking. Many of them actually learned and grew from being around and embracing diverse cultures. They became mindful and open the door to form relationships with others, particularly AA students.

Some of the participants described how racial tension had a negative impact on them academically in high school. Most of them believed they received less academic support than their peers in and out of the classroom. Bobby who was struggling academically confessed he had never been a good student. He stated, "I had poor study habits and math skills." He shared he had reached out to his high school teachers for help but felt singled out. "I felt singled out as an AA male student. Others [white students] were experiencing the same academic challenges I faced but encountered less barriers."

Likewise, Johnny received low grades in several of his high school classes. One particular teacher assumed he would not make it to college. He recalled:

My mom loves to tell this story. When I came back to high school my sophomore year, I had a sit down session with one of the school's counselors. It was standard that we discuss whether or not I was going to attend college. I told her yes and shared that I was on the football team. I told her that I wanted to play football for either USC or Michigan. She started laughing and stated "your grades will never get you into either of those schools... you should try community college."

Johnny stated, “It really hurt me to hear such a negative remark from my counselor.” As a result, he used the negative experience “as motivation.” He made it a personal goal to prove his counselor wrong. Similar, another participant shared his perspective on the limited academic support he received in high school. He reflected, “It took a toll on me both physically and mentally. Unlike my peers, I sought support and guidance that was non-existent.” Likewise, Ricky echoed the notion that racism played a role in his subpar academic performance in high school. He shared, “... being an AA male, it was preconceived that I was supposed to fail my courses.” This theme revealed that the participants’ precollege experiences, reframing racism, played an important role in shaping their college success.

Theme III: FG Students Reinventing Themselves

This theme reflects a reinvention process experienced by the FGAA male students in college. Participants reported new levels of self-esteem that appeared to have helped them overcome the baggage they brought into college (Bandura, 1995; Lang, 1988). Essentially, these socio-economic disadvantages deemed them at-risk of academic failure upon entering college. At-risk populations are defined as those students who enter college from a disadvantaged social background, with a history of delinquency and some failing grades in high school (Wiggins, 2011). Davis (2010) defined self-esteem as a global measure of an individual’s self-concept that encompasses personal judgments about one’s self-worth. High levels of self-esteem characterize people who have an internal locus of control and who are less likely to be influenced by the views of others (Davis, 2010).

Participants' progression to college seemed to have increased confidence in their academic ability thereby preventing academic failure. Participants shared how their precollege and college experiences help transform their lives. Mike perceived going to college as a process of renewal. He stated "I was excited about shredding some of my past and starting anew." For Ricky, "The transition opened up a world of new opportunities and a new beginning." He added, "It was the perfect time for me to re-establish myself and become a better me." Participants felt confident to engage with the college community in various ways thereby finding academic success. This finding supports Spady's theory of engagement which asserted that students must be actively and meaningfully engaged in learning activities through interactions with others (Tierney, 2004). For example, Bobby participated in several study groups, spent time at the library, and developed positive relationships with faculty and advisors. Bobby shared an anecdote of his typical day in college. He stated:

I start my day at work in which I am a Community Assistant at the residence hall. So I spend time interacting with my residents. After work, I go to class in the afternoon. After class, I'm either going to my study group or to the library to get some course work done.

Bobby confirmed Cutjet's (2006) assertion that academic success depends on a student's level of engagement in college. He stated:

Just making sure that I devote more time to studying throughout the week and not just when it comes time for a test or something like that. Each time I learn the material I would go home and practice or review it.

Consequently, Bobby transformed into a social butterfly as his "... interest and mindset had changed." Bobby found new value and benefits in associating with a diverse group of academically focused college peers. He stated:

It was a pleasure being around students who had similar mentalities and the same goals as me. Like mine, their goal was to come to college and be successful. So our interactions were meaningful and inspiring. They were from different degree programs which was good for me as well. I like meeting and interacting with diverse groups.

Bobby also tried his hand at leadership. He enjoyed being president of Collegiate 100. He commented, "I really enjoy the time I spend with Collegiate 100. They introduced me to different people in the community and shared a variety of leadership opportunities. I got to speak and hear others which encouraged me."

College experience transformed Johnny from an impersonable, very distant and delinquent juvenile to being a self-assured student. He reflected on his newly found confidence:

I would say that the best part about attending an HBCU is the confidence you receive straight out the bag. Also being around other AA students help me gain a higher level of self-confidence. As an AA student, I feel I started out [in college] a lot more confident than I expected. Gaining the self-confidence was an added bonus.

Johnny also felt liberated from his childhood circumstances of poverty and lack of a sense of purpose. He confidently stated: "...it's great that you get to set the bar as high as you want to." He continued:

.... I look in the mirror sometimes and I see a guy wearing glasses and a bow tie now. It's weird but it's me. I mean it's cool. I articulate myself now because I'm not embarrassed to speak in front of others. I've also traded in my bandana for twirling a cane. Shouts out to my fraternal brothers.

Mike, however, realized he wanted to attend college but struggled academically. As a result, he refocused his attention from sports to academics. He shared:

Thinking back, I don't feel I was prepared academically for college. I had to give up sports and focus on my academics. I realized something was deficient in my preparation in high school... my grades told the story. As a FG student, my background and resources were limited. I had to adjust or face expulsion.

Ralph had struggled to overcome the effects of bullying from his childhood and learned to be more assertive around his peers. He admitted, "The transition into college was, for me, very hard but I took it by storm and just allowed God to be my father and just direct me in a way in which he wanted me to go." Ralph reflected on an experience he had in high school:

I think I was tired of trying to fit in. I felt I always had to defend myself or stand up for myself and that got me into fights. From there I started to discover myself, at least from a beginner stage, so I think just the exploration of myself was important.

Although Ralph still harbored some resentment at his absent father and some teachers for his pre-college struggles, he was determined to shed some of the stigmas that plagued him in the past. He tapped into his personal strengths and became socially engaged on campus. Ralph shared, "I can never forget where I came from and what is actually still

going on. So through my social support system, I now have the energy and motivation to succeed.”

Participants transitioned from boyhood into manhood while in college. The absence of a stable father figure during their childhood years may have a direct correlation to their struggle into manhood (Roth, 2007). It is evident the effect of college and its Eurocentric views of what it is to be a man inspired these young men to reinvent themselves from boys to men. Ricky was influenced by his college environment. He incorporated aspects of his college dominant culture to redefine his own concepts of manhood. Ricky shared his new attributes associated with manhood:

It’s an amazing feeling. College have taught me a lot. I’ve grown as a man. Everyone looks up to me, you know. Most people didn’t see me going as far because of my past but I did a whole 360. Well, they say I did a whole 360. I feel like I’m on a pedestal and I don’t want to let them down.

Bobby voiced similar sentiments:

Being the first in my family to reach this milestone is incredible. Reflecting back on where I came from to where I am today is remarkable. I’ve matured in way that I never dreamed. Right now I feel as though I have grown both mentally and physically.

Johnny also experienced the transition from a boy to a young adult in college. He reflected:

I have practically grown up on this campus. From long days in the classrooms to countless hours in study groups. As I reflect on my college life, I can say that I have made great progress from my freshmen year to now.

The participants were aware that maturity does not come in an instance but it emerges over a period of time (Swail, 2004; Van Manren, 1990). As a result, they were able to cultivate their adult identity, reflect on their values, and establish positive behaviors that defined their manhood in college.

According to the six participants, no one was going to pave the way for them to obtain their educational goal. Consequently in college, they took the opportunity to successfully reinvent themselves. Having to transform for success helped the participants learn a valuable lesson in regards to “seizing” the moment. Ralph articulated, “Taking advantage of life changing opportunities is worth it, no matter whenever or however those opportunities come.” The participants experienced the benefits of reinvention and understood that on-campus engagement helped them achieve academic and social success.

Summary

This chapter discussed the major themes that surfaced as the participants shared their perspectives on how their precollege and college experiences influenced their successful academic and social progression in college. The participants’ responses provided an in-depth understanding of the factors that impacted their journey towards obtaining their degrees. As indicated, the findings of the study support and confirm the relevance of the themes in regards to the participants’ overall college experiences. Family influences and reinventing themselves appear to hold the most meaning for the participants. However, what is also implied is that each of the themes played an instrumental role in supporting the social and academic needs of the participants in their quest to seeking success and obtaining their college degree.

Chapter VI

ANALYSIS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of FGAA male students concerning the practices employed that influenced their academic and social progression at an identified HBCU to obtain their 4-year degree. My goal was to understand, from the students' perspective, why they chose to enroll and successfully persist based on their precollege and college experiences. Through a series of interviews, the six participants shared stories about their experiences and perspectives on what helped them to be successful. The findings, from the data analysis process, provided a solid foundation on which to make recommendations and offer ideas for further studies. Two questions guided this study: 1) what practices employed by FGAA male students at an identified HBCU to obtain their 4-year degrees proved to be successful and which practices were least successful, and 2) which institutional policies and programs proved to be most supportive or least supportive to FGAA male students at an identified HBCU while obtaining their 4-year degree?

The six participants in this study were selected utilizing purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2013). After selecting the participants, the data was collected, transcribed, coded and analyzed. During the data collection process, I utilized Seidman's (2006) three-series interview method. Further, a document review was conducted which allowed me to refine and create a more manageable data set (Patton, 2002). Part of the

data analysis process included transcribing the audio recording and coding the results. As I coded, read, and re-read the interviews' transcriptions, common themes were discovered. The three themes identified provided insight into the precollege and college experiences of six FGAA male students as they successfully persisted at an HBCU.

Three major themes emerged from the findings of the study exploring FGAA male students' precollege and college experiences and their perspectives on what made them successful. The emerged themes were: (1) community and family influences on educational goals, (2) responding productively to racism, and (3) FG student reinventing themselves. These themes provided a means for answering the study's research questions. While most of the findings from this study support existing literature, it also contributes to the knowledge of what impacts FGAA male college students' experiences. Further, the findings supported and related to the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 1. Table 5 provides an illustration of the major themes with a "+" representing if a participant subscribed to the theme whereas a "-" means it was not indicated in the data.

Table 5

Characteristics Themes of FGAA Male Students

Themes	Participants					
	Ralph	Ronnie	Bobby	Ricky	Mike	Johnny
Family Influences on Educational Goals	+	+	+	+	+	+
Community Influences on Educational Goals	-	+	+	+	+	+
Responding Productively to Racism	-	+	+	-	+	+
FG Students Reinventing Themselves	+	+	+	+	+	+

Theme I: Community and Family Influences on Educational Goals

This theme is useful in understanding the influence of family and community on FGAA male students' attrition, persistence, and academic aspirations. All participants resonated with this theme. Bryan and Simmons (2009) remarked that family and community relationships played key roles in FG students' social development and academic success. Connections with families provided participants with identity and security. In line with this finding, McCarron and Inkelas, (2006) suggested one of the best predictors of postsecondary aspirations is family support. The family is the most important institution that makes up a society (Bangura, 2012). Participants described

extended families consisting of multiple generations - aunts, uncles, grandparents. For example, Ralph shared lessons of support received from his grandmother. He stated:

Yes my relationship with my grandparents was much better than the relationship with my parents. For quite some time, until about third grade, I stayed with my grandmother. She was very influential in my life and showed me a lot of love. She took me on vacations and introduced me to a stable lifestyle which was foreign to me.

The notion of extended family is very common within the AA culture (Bangura, 2012). Extended families are highly beneficial because they lead to a more effective way to guide AA males from single-parent households. Typically, these individuals come from low-income families residing in high-crime poor neighborhoods (McAdoo, 2007). Astin's theory of student involvement supports the view that students bring cultural capital to the college environment which, in turn determines a large part of their social and academic success. This theory reflects how family members influence the morals and behaviors of students.

AA communities tend to have a spiritual orientation and collective ethos which encourage men and women to rise up and provide guidance to the students (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Participants in this study demonstrated spiritual connection through church membership, church attendance, a sense of right and wrong, teaching moral values, and a shared religious core. All participants perceived the church as an extension of the family that could be trusted. Participants believed one of the most spiritual things they could do was serve God by attending church (Cherlin, 2010). For example, Mike

showed his spiritual connection by joining the local church choir. He stated, “Singing in church is one of my first loves.”

The extended families played a major role of motivating and encouraging participants. All participants reported family support contributed the most to their college success. They conveyed how attending college brought them respect and admiration from family and people in their community. The family networks provided the appropriate role models missing in their immediate households. Families encouraged them to pursue education for a better life. Further, they reported their mothers and grandmothers were the most influential and their strongest supporters.

This theme supports the assumption that if more AA communities begin to utilize the extended family concept, they will have more of a sense of togetherness in their families (Boyd-Franklin, 2013). This sense of togetherness may counter the problems often associated with FGAA male students from single parent households. This may end a lot of socioeconomic problems faced by the FGAA male students because the families will provide a safety net for all children to thrive. This supports existing literature on the importance of parental and family support and involvement (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2004).

Theme II: Responding Productively to Racism.

This theme illustrates the resilience and use of race coping strategies by the participants to manage distress from racial experiences prior to college. Hodge, Harrison, Burden and Dixson (2008) identified African American youths as being the most likely of all subgroups in America to be victimized by practices of systemic racism. This notion was confirmed through participants’ stories. For example, Ralph felt slighted when his

teacher told him that, “he’ll never amount to anything” simply based on his race. Consequently, he experienced a lack of self-confidence and a decline in his academic performance. Feeling victimized, participants deployed coping strategies to deal with racism. These strategies included use of illegal drugs and other contrabands. Johnny shared an anecdote about his struggle with issues of self-identity and eventually found solace in drugs. He stated:

So I had a lot of self-confidence issues about being prejudged because I am a black male. That was the point when I struggled with my racial identity. I actually started smoking and doing other bad things at an early age.

On the other hand, Ronnie found a more constructive strategy to deal with racism. He chose to work hard in school and defy the negative teacher’s stereotypical assertion about Black people and inferior academic performance. He stated, “It [racism] hurt me so that’s why I pushed so hard today to prove to people I’m going to be successful. It’s about taking something negativity and converting it to something positive.” Ralph, reported a counter narrative of racism – one in which a Black teacher taught him to be proud of his race and culture as a Black person. Ralph neatly captured his racial experience with his history teacher in the following anecdote:

My history teacher was pro-black. He would always talk about black history and how important it is to value our culture... it pushes you to perform. At the time I thought he was crazy but I loved and was inspired by his passion.

Bobby shared similar sentiments, “I’m not ashamed of who I am or where I come from.”

The second theme explored strategies employed by participants to counter racial experiences. They were able to turn these negative experiences of race based on

favoritism, prejudice, and discrimination into positive outcomes (Berger & Lyon, 2005). In response, they chose to work hard in college to disprove their high school teachers' racist beliefs about young AA male students. As a result, the participants reframed the negative stereotypes and utilized them as motivators for success.

Theme III: FG Students Reinventing Themselves

College for the FGAA male students, was a place of re-birth. Participants took time to reflect on how their lives had transformed from childhood into adulthood. They were painfully aware of the odds stacked against them simply by being first in their families to go to college. All participants were socialized into traditional AA cultural backgrounds that were somewhat different from the pervasive Eurocentric college culture. They had to reinvent themselves as they transitioned from the home culture to the college culture. According to Ashcroft et al. (2002), Eurocentrism is the practice, conscious or otherwise, of placing emphasis on European (and, generally, Western) concerns, culture and values at the expense of those within their own culture. Eurocentrism in this case involved claiming a culture that is not AA, or denying the pervasive AA oriented values in which they were socialized in their neighborhoods prior to going to college. This transition required participants in some cases to change the way they dressed from the neighborhood casual, to more formal outfits acceptable on a college campus. They also had to learn the art of perseverance in order to catch up academically with peers from more supportive and well to do family backgrounds.

Rather than succumb to stereotypic beliefs that depict Blacks as intellectually inferior to Whites (Cherlin, 2010; Hodge et al., 2008), the participants had to persist in order to be successful in college. Tierney (2004) confirmed the determination of FG

students not to accept the status quo and find their “footing” on campus. Thus, to fit in and be successful, Bobby became excited to become President of the Collegiate 100 club. As president, he recruited and mentored young AA males. Similarly, Johnny became the President of his fraternal organization which promotes AA male engagement and interactions. Both Bobby and Johnny transformed into leaders and became positive role models within their communities and on campus.

Most of the participants were thrilled by the opportunity to reinvent themselves. Upon enrolling in college, Ricky and Mike felt underprepared academically. Bonner (2010) acknowledged this is common for FG students based on their precollege characteristics. Ricky and Mike shared stories of their struggles adjusting to college-level academics. Ricky stressed, “My freshmen year I discovered I wasn’t prepared to have both a social and academic life.” Mike expressed similar sentiments:

I wasn’t happy with the academics. It was difficult balancing my coursework with my involvement in extracurricular activities on campus. I believe it’s important to socialize but now my priority is academics. Not to brag but I made the Dean’s List twice.

As a result, Ricky and Mike decided to focus heavily on academics and less on the social side of college. Now, as seniors, they reflected on how they worked hard to establish a good academic record. Based on findings from the document review, Ricky and Mike are expected to graduate with a 3.0 or higher GPA. The idea of student perseverance and determination to succeed is in keeping with Tinto (1993) theory of Student Integration, which suggested students should focus their college experiences on having successful academic interactions.

Participants realized the importance of reinventing themselves in order to make positive and meaningful changes in their lives. Each individual experienced various levels of transformation throughout their college career. Transformation is a process that leads to a journey of discovery (Bosco, 2012; Flowers, 2004). Aside from the challenges faced during their precollege and college experiences, the participants were able to successfully reinvent themselves. Whether it was through taking advantage of leadership opportunities or academic improvements, the participants made the needed adjustments to strive towards success in college.

Research Questions: Final Discussion Summary

The previous two chapters presented the findings and themes that emerged from the participant interviews and document analysis. These findings and themes provided a means to answer the research questions that guided this study. The following are the research questions combined with the respective answers.

RQ1: What practices employed by FGAA male students at an identified HBCU to obtain their 4-year degrees proved to be successful and which practices were least successful?

Participants' deployed various strategies to achieve success in college. It is important to identify and discuss the factors which influenced the strategies that contributed to their success. Among the factors that influenced FGAA male students' success was: (1) perseverance, (2) leadership, (3) relationship building, and (4) choice of friends. The participants perceived there was a connection between the factors listed and their academic and social achievements in college.

The participants' emphasized one factor that contributed to their college success was "perseverance." Ward and Siegel (2012) defined perseverance as steadfastness in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success. Some of the participants spoke about how they persevered in their precollege and college experiences. Ronnie asserted, "Simply put, I never gave up." Mike expounded on Ronnie's feelings with a similar statement about his college classes. He reflected:

As a FG college student, I struggled in many of my classes. But I reached out to my professors and advisors for help. They guided me to resources such as tutorials and support service programs that help me to carve a path to my success. I used this obstacle as a stepping stone.

Bobby learned a lesson in perseverance by taking advantage of social opportunities on campus. He recalled:

My sophomore year I started to feel like college wasn't a good fit for me. I felt alone and isolated. This led to frustration and I gained a negative attitude about everything. At that point, I was ready to drop out. Fortunately (had to be a blessing) I was introduced to clubs and organizations on campus. That changed my outlook to be more positive so I decided to stay.

Students who persevere regardless of their situation can make their college experiences meaningful (Ward & Siegel, 2012). As it relates to the participants in this study, it led to academic and social success in college.

The participants' interpreted college as a time to learn and grow. As previously mentioned, they took full advantage of their college experience as an opportunity to transform their lives. Some of the participants shared how they took on a leadership role

in one or several of the clubs and organizations on campus. They felt this was the best way to challenge themselves, gain authority, and learn valuable skills they can use during and after their college career. Both Bobby and Johnny hold leadership positions in two separate organizations. Similar Ralph is the student body president and seeks to make a difference on campus. He shared:

In my role as SGA president, I have learned some valuable leadership skills.

During our meetings, I get to watch leadership in action as we discuss (sometimes debate) issues that impact our entire student body. I get to experience many levels of adversity and conflict. At the end of the day, it helped to develop me into a leader... in a formal, structured way.

Harper (2012) determined FG students are motivated to achieve success when they are actively involved in collegiate activities. Despite their FG status, some of the participants are using their leadership opportunities to shape their future success.

The participants built strong relationships with faculty members on campus. Most of the participants were happy the professors knew their names and put forth the effort to know and understand them. These relationships can often boost the level of student-faculty interactions on and off campus (Adams, 2011; Flowers, 2004). Johnny expressed having a positive relationship with his professors. He shared:

I feel like I related to most of my professors actually. If any professor would stick out to me the most it would probably be Dr. G. But she wasn't the first person in terms of professors, somebody who really believed in my talent and ability to go places in life. She wasn't scared to voice her opinion and she wasn't easy on me either. Knowing all that she had accomplished in her life, I felt that was a good

person. I would say out of my college career that was my most inspirational professor.

Ronnie echoed similar feelings:

I encountered numerous professors that I felt supported me. My math teacher Ms. H and we still keep in touch to this day. She still continues to encourage me no matter what to keep pushing. Although I am a FG student she believes in me so that helps me as well. She has really had an impact on my life.

Moreover, participants stressed the importance of positive peer and friend relationships.

Like most students, the participants cherished the close relationships they formed in college. Some of their peers became their friends and roommates. Bobby spoke about how his friends supported him academically in college. He explained:

My circle of friends is small. I stayed away from people who were bad and wanted to bring me down. To put it another way, I was taught to associate myself with positive people that had the same interest as me. They provided me with academic motivation when I needed it.

Mike attributed his success in college to his ability to choose good friends. He shared:

OK, I've met good and bad friends. Most of my good friends were in the choir. I still communicate with them to this day. However, there's a time in your life when you realize all of your friends aren't good. That's when you have to grow up and get over people. Everybody doesn't have your best interest at heart. I definitely learned that in college.

Students' social involvement is crucial to their persistence (Astin, 1984). Positive relationships between faculty and students contribute to the participants overall learning

experience, thereby contributing to their academic success. On the contrary, positive relationships with peers (friends) benefitted them socially.

As the participants shared stories about their most successful practices, they later shared stories about their least successful practices. Some of them cited concerns in regards to being reluctant to seek help from family, faculty, and peers. Bobby believed, “The only one he could depend on was himself.” Despite the admiration of being independent, some of the participants struggled to balance multiple responsibilities. Thus, putting too much mental and physical pressure on themselves. For instance, Ricky and Johnny juggled classes, extracurricular activities, and working. Johnny described it as “multi-tasking on steroids.” Consequently, both participants struggled to adjust which left them feeling unsupported and depressed. Johnny recalled:

I have been working since high school. But the rigors of college academics and the demands of social activities was overwhelming. Something had to give or I was on my way to having a mental breakdown. Luckily I found a balance before it was too late.

Bowen (2008) reported students who juggled multiple responsibilities may experience adverse effects on their social and academic performance in college.

RQ2: Which institutional policies and programs proved to be most supportive or least supportive to FGAA male students at an identified HBCU while obtaining their 4-year degree?

A thorough review of institutional policy documents and interview data revealed a variety of policies, programs or services offered by the college to support FGAA male students find success. For example, Collegiate 100 is a campus organization founded and

led by students. Its purpose is to provide one-on-one and group mentoring to students in college. The program seeks to support the development of social, emotional, and educational needs of young men who need positive role models in their lives. This program helped groom students like Bobby to rise to high echelons of leadership as president of Collegiate 100. Bobby expressed gratitude for this opportunity to lead others. He shared, “I have had the opportunity to meet new people and build relationships. I believe in the Collegiate 100 quote which states, ‘what you see is what you’ll be.’ So I try to learn and grow with my fellow brothers.”

The college hosts the Greek Life organizations for students. The purpose of the Greek Life organizations is to encourage members to strive for academic excellence, foster strong leadership skills, and engage in community service activities (Johnson, 2013). Johnny, Mike, and Ralph are members of Greek Life organizations on campus. Although they are in different fraternities, they formed brotherly bonds and advised each other as they transitioned from boys to young men. Ralph asserted, “My [fraternal] brothers were an inspiration for me through the good and bad... from sophomore year to now.”

Campus programs, such as AA Male Initiative, targets AA male students and provide social support to make campuses more welcoming and affirming for AA males. The program also offers opportunities for members to share knowledge and resources needed to navigate college campuses and access campus support services. The AA Male Initiative is a coordinated system-wide effort that aims to improve AA male student enrollments, persistence, and degree attainment rates in the state’s public community colleges and four-year institutions. Over the past decade, a variety of campus-based

programming, services, and outreach efforts that target AA male students at critical junctures along their educational pathways have been implemented at 25 University System of Georgia (USG) schools (USG, 2017).

Given the key role of programs in supporting academic performance from underserved student populations and advocating on behalf of college outreach and preparation initiatives, programs such as TRIO are beneficial to students. TRIO program is a federally funded outreach and student services program which serves FG college students. Some of the programs associated with TRIO include tutoring, mentoring, and counseling services. Participants in the current study utilized the tutorial services offered to improve their academic performance in class. Mike expressed, “By going to the tutorial lab, I was able to see an improvement in my grades.”

Mentoring was also a valuable service rendered by TRIO. Students in this program are paired with a mentor who support and encourage their academic and personal growth. Further, counseling services address the psychological, emotional, and developmental needs of students. This service also promotes a safe and healthy environment for students to communicate (and hopefully resolve) problems and concerns. Based on Berger and Lyon’s (2005) perspective, students who come from disadvantage backgrounds should be targeted for support by providing them access to improvement programs. Thus all participants relied on the institutional policies and programs for support and guidance.

Financial aid programs supported these AA male students financially. The study participants’ qualified for financial assistance based on their low-income status. All participants received financial aid packages which included the Pell Grant. The Pell

Grant is a federal loan which targets financially needy students. This loan assists student with paying tuition however it doesn't have to be repaid. Students understood that the Pell Grant was their best financial opportunity. Ricky described his experience of being a Pell Grant recipient. He stated, "It was a blessing and I'm thankful."

The study participants admitted familiarity with the institutional policies contained in the student code of conduct (SCC). They all acknowledge receiving copies of the SCC after completing their freshmen orientation. The SCC is a document which provides guidance on student behavior, actions, and practices in accordance with the objectives and standards of the University. Basically, the SCC helps students understand the "do's" and "don'ts" as it relates to college. For example, hazing was the policy most of the students mentioned during their interviews. Hazing is any action or situation, with or without the consent of the participants, which recklessly, intentionally, or unintentionally endangers the mental, physical, or academic health or safety of a student.

In contrast, some institutional programs were found, such as the Financial Literacy program, which seemed to be underutilized. This program is meant to provide workshops to help students to identify financial resources to fund their tuition and other cost associated with college. The participant's apparent unawareness of this program may suggest the university's poor marketing strategies. This may also reflect on poor counseling services that are probably failing to educate students on all viable financial resources available to them.

Few students had knowledge of the Career Services and the Ombudsman Office on campus. Career services are meant to provide resources to help students explore career opportunities and job placement. This is especially helpful to FGAA male who

need all the help they can get to navigate the world of work. Most students do not have family role models to lead the way. Thus, the institutions failure to step into this void does a disservice to this group of students. Additionally, the Ombudsman Office is meant to provide confidential and informal assistance for resolving university-related concerns. These programs were the least effective since most participants were unaware of their existence.

The institutional policies, services and programs discussed in this section are particularly important for this group of students who start college at a significant disadvantage compared to their peers. Participants reported coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds, with no role models to guide them through college. Thus all participants relied on the institution for guidance. By taking advantage of these programs, the participants were able to obtain the necessary support and guidance that was pivotal to their success in college.

Limitations of the Study

Merriam (2002) articulated all research studies have their strengths and limitations. That said, there were limitations associated with this study. Methodologically, this study presents six FGAA male students' perspectives through my research lens. It is possible that my interaction with participants may have put more emphasis on other issues and overlooked others. I could not triangulate participants' data with stakeholders including faculty, family members, and college administrators because they were not part of this study. Future studies will need to investigate the perceptions of other stakeholders to gain full understanding of the college experiences of FGAA male students.

This study took into account the perceptions of the six FGAA male students who volunteered to participate in the study. The findings are limited to the perceptions of the six participants and not representative of all the FG students who currently or previously attended the college. Also, this study was limited by geographic boundaries. All of the participants were from and attended an HBCU in Georgia. Expanding the boundaries to include other states, would diversify the participant pool and promote future studies at other HBCU's. Thus, this study creates opportunity for future research on average or below-average performing FGAA male students.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study had implications related to policy and practice for institutions serving FGAA male students. Moreover, institutional leadership can utilize these results from this study to help create a college environment that promotes increased retention and persistence of FGAA male students. First, faculty and administration should identify the obstacles faced by FGAA male students on and off campus. This would promote future discussions concerning FGAA male student retention. Second, widespread institutional support is needed to ensure FGAA male students are successful in pursuit of their college degrees. Faculty and staff should ensure they are consistently providing the necessary resources, support, and guidance to cultivate FG student growth and success. Third, faculty and administration should promote and foster student engagement. Ward and Siegel (2012) and Pascarella et al. (2004) emphasized the importance of student academic and social engagement in regards to their success in college.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study offered a glimpse into the collegiate lives of six FGAA male students attending an HBCU. Using a phenomenological approach, the study provided valuable data about the challenges FGAA male students face in college. There are several opportunities for future research which stemmed from the study findings. After carefully reviewing the findings and limitations associated with this study, five recommendations for future studies arose.

- A study could be conducted on FGAA male students from the perceptions of parents and institutions.
- A study could be conducted on how student and faculty relationships impact academic performance.
- A study could be conducted on FGAA female students on their lived experiences at an HBCU.
- A study could be conducted on FGAA male students attending a predominately white institution (PWI).

Conclusion

The findings of this study reflected the participants' experiences and reasons for success while attending an HBCU. It was through their experiences they found the motivation and inspiration to enroll and persist in college. As the participants successfully persisted in college, they developed a level of self-confidence in regards to their academic and social progression. They were also able to reinvent themselves and gained the level of knowledge and support necessary to complete their degree. Moreover, the study provided insight into how the participants' academic and social

involvement was influential to their success as well. The findings also supported the literature and theoretical framework in regards to their challenges and how they overcame obstacles. Lastly, the findings reaffirmed the importance of institutions promoting engagement on campus which impacts retention and persistence.

The educational challenges confronting FGAA male students are enormous. Policymakers at all levels must join educational leaders and others in efforts to remove barriers that cyclically undermine the enrollment and persistence of FGAA male students and other populations with low college completion rates. Although this study has focused on postsecondary education, I recognize that a corresponding P-12 policy agenda aimed at preparing young FGAA male students for college is also required.

Policymakers at federal, state, and local levels must do more to support (financially and otherwise) efforts in college preparatory programs, community organizations, schools, and postsecondary institutions to strengthen FGAA male students' pathways to higher education. But simply having these men enroll does not guarantee they will persist through graduation. Ensuring they have viable opportunities to attend and complete degree programs is an important step in meeting the United States postsecondary attainment goals espoused by national leaders and others. Investing more resources into efforts to better educate FGAA males would yield greater returns for society.

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APPENDIX A:

Valdosta State University Consent to Participate

VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY
Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled “Breaking Barriers: Successfully Retaining First Generation African-American Male Students at a Historical Black College and University.” This research study is being conducted by Curdedra Andrews, a student in Educational Leadership at Valdosta State University. The researcher has explained to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask the researcher any questions you have to help you understand this project and your possible participation in it. A basic explanation of the research is given below. Please read this carefully and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have. The University asks that you give your signed agreement if you wish to participate in this research study.

Purpose of the Research: This study involves research. The purpose of the study is to explore the common practices employed by successful First Generation African-American (FGAA) male students attending a Historically Black College and University (HBCU).

Procedures: This research study will focus on the common social and academic practices and experiences of FGAA male students attending a HBCU. We will meet to engage in face-to-face interviews in various locations (yet to be determined) on campus. You will be asked to take part in a series of three-interviews with a time allotment of 60 minutes per session. During the interviews, you will be asked 10 open-ended questions (per session). Your responses will be recorded via tape recorder and note pad. The interviews will be conducted over a 4-6 week period. There are no alternatives to the experimental procedures in this study. The only alternative is to choose not to participate at all.

In addition, there are some details about the study that you are not being told in advance. When your participation is over, the study will be explained to you in full detail, and all of your questions will be answered. At that time, you can decide whether or not you want your information to be used in the study.

Possible Risks or Discomfort: Although there are no known risks associated with these research procedures, it is not always possible to identify all potential risks of participating in a research study. However, the University has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize potential but unknown risks. By agreeing to participate in the research study, you are not waiving any rights that you may have against Valdosta State University for injury resulting from negligence of the University or its researchers.

Potential Benefits: Although you [may/will] not benefit directly from this research, your participation will help the researcher gain additional understanding of the common

practices of successful FGAA male students attending a HBCU. Knowledge gained may contribute to addressing the issue of FGAA male student retention and persistence.

Costs and Compensation: There are no costs to you for your participation in this research study.

Assurance of Confidentiality: Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your information confidential to the extent allowed by law. Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a university committee charged with reviewing research to ensure the rights and welfare of research participants, may be given access to your confidential information. The audio tapes will be used to transcribe each interview that will be included as a part of the data collection and analysis for the study. The information provided will be locked in a file cabinet with access rights granted only to the researcher. Your confidentiality will be ensured by utilizing pseudonyms for the participant and the University selected. The information will be kept until the completion of the study and the awarding of the doctoral degree. At the time of destruction, the information will be shredded.

Voluntary Participation: Your decision to participate in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you agree now to participate and change your mind later, you are free to leave the study. Your decision not to participate at all or to stop participating at any time in the future will not have any effect on any rights you have or any services you are otherwise entitled to from Valdosta State University.

During the interview sessions, though not recommended, you may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If at any time you chose to withdraw from the study, your information will be deleted from the database and will not be included in the research study.

Information Contacts: Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Curdedra Andrews at 912-358-4041 or andrewsd@savannahstate.edu. This study has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-333-7837 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Agreement to Participate: The research project and my role in it have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, I am indicating that I am 18 years of age or older. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I would like to receive a copy of the results of this study: Yes No

Mailing Address:

E-mail Address: _____

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

This research project has been approved by the
Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board for
the Protection of Human Research Participants through
the date noted below:



APPENDIX B:
Participant Invitation Letter

To: Participant(s)

From: Curdedra Andrews

Subject: Research Study Participation Invitation (Pathways to Success at a HBCU: An Examination of the Experiences of First Generation African American Male Students)

Greetings,

My name is Curdedra Andrews. I am currently a postgraduate student pursuing a doctorate degree at Valdosta State University. I am seeking participants for my research study. I will be conducting interviews as part of a research study to increase my understanding of the academic and social practices employed that successfully influence the progression of First Generation African American (FGAA) male students attending a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). The study will explore lived experiences as students persist to obtain a 4-year degree. As a FGAA male student (meeting the study's criteria) attending SSU, you are in an ideal position to give me valuable first-hand information from your own perspective. Your name and email address was obtained from the school's student database.

A total of 3 interviews will be conducted for each participant over a 6 to 8 week period. The interviews will take approximately 60 minutes or less and will be very informal. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each participant will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and documenting of findings. In addition, confidential information associated with the study will be secured in a filing cabinet in my home.

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research and findings which could lead to improvements in policies, programs, and services associated with SSU. Further, the results of the study could lead to a better understanding of how the institution can increase retention and graduation rates.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Curdedra N. Andrews at cnandrews@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from

Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-259- 5045 or irb@valdosta.edu.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please respond to this email (cnandrews@valdosta.edu) by Friday, January 27th or sooner. Please note that you do not have to respond if you are not interested in participating in this study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Curdedra Andrews

Curdedra Andrews

APPENDIX C:
Participant Questionnaire

Name: _____

First

Last

Middle Initial

Race: _____ Gender: Male _____ Female _____

What is your classification? Freshmen _____ Sophomore _____ Junior _____ Senior _____

What is your major? _____

(If you are a double major, include both)

What is your current cumulative GPA? _____

Have you attended SSU for four consecutive years or longer? Yes _____ No _____

How many credit hours have you earned? _____

When do you expect to graduate? _____

(Include year and semester Ex.: Fall 2017)

Are you a Pell grant recipient? Yes _____ No _____

What is your mother's highest level of education? (Check only one answer):

____ Some high school

____ High school graduate

____ Associate degree or some college

____ Bachelor's degree

____ Master's degree

____ Doctorate

____ Don't know

What is your father's highest level of education? (Check only one answer):

____ Some high school

___ High school graduate

___ Associate degree or some college

___ Bachelor's degree

___ Master's degree

___ Doctorate

___ Don't know

APPENDIX D:
Audiotaped Consent Statement

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled “Breaking Barriers: Successfully Retaining First Generation African-American Male Students at a Historical Black College and University”, which is being conducted by Curdedra N. Andrews, a graduate student at Valdosta State University. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of FGAA male students concerning the practices employed that influenced their academic and social progression at an identified HBCU to obtain their 4-year degree. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. The interview will be audio/video taped in order to capture your concerns, opinions, and ideas. Once the recordings have been transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in the interview will serve as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 years of age or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Curdedra N. Andrews at cnandrews@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-259-5045 or irb@valdosta.edu.

APPENDIX E:
Interview Schedules

INTERVIEW SESSIONS #1			
Date	Time	Location	Name
Tuesday, Feb. 7 th	12:00-1:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Ralph
Tuesday, Feb. 7 th	5:00-6:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Johnny
Wednesday, Feb. 8 th	12:00-1:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Mike
Wednesday, Feb. 8 th	5:00-6:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Ronnie
Thursday, Feb. 9 th	12:00-1:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Bobby
Thursday, Feb. 9 th	5:00-6:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Ricky

INTERVIEW SESSIONS #2			
Date	Time	Location	Name
Tuesday, Feb. 14 th	12:00-1:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Ralph
Tuesday, Feb. 14 th	5:00-6:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Johnny
Wednesday, Feb. 15 th	12:00-1:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Mike
Wednesday, Feb. 15 th	5:00-6:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Ronnie
Thursday, Feb. 16 th	12:00-1:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Bobby
Thursday, Feb. 16 th	5:00-6:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Ricky

INTERVIEW SESSIONS #3			
Date	Time	Location	Name
Monday, Feb. 20 th	12:00-1:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Ralph
Monday, Feb. 20 th	5:00-6:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Johnny
Wednesday, Feb. 22 nd	12:00-1:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Mike
Wednesday, Feb. 22 nd	5:00-6:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Ronnie
Thursday, Feb. 23 rd	12:00-1:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Bobby
Thursday, Feb. 23 rd	5:00-6:00pm	Hill Hall – Conference Room	Ricky

APPENDIX F:
Interview Questions

<p>Session 1:</p> <p>Pre-College Experiences</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about your childhood community. 2. What type of relationship did you have with your parents and siblings? 3. Describe how family and community influenced your decision to attend college. 4. Did you attend church? If so, how did your spirituality impact your childhood? 5. Who was the most influential person in your life growing up? 6. Please share some of your experiences in middle and high school (likes and dislikes). 7. Who was your favorite and least favorite teachers/counselors? 8. What was your favorite extracurricular activity? 9. Do you feel that high school prepared you for college? 10. Explain your transition from high school to college. What did you do to prepare?
<p>Session 2:</p> <p>College Experiences</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How did your family and friends feel about you attending college? 2. Describe your thoughts about attending an HBCU. Why? 3. What was the campus culture like at SSU? Did you feel that you were a “fit” for this school? 4. Describe your experiences in regards to academic and social activities on campus? 5. How do you define success? 6. Tell me about your relationships with faculty, staff, and peers. What type of impact have they had on your success? 7. Are you involved in any extracurricular activities on or off campus? If so, please elaborate. 8. What are the specific programs and/or services offered on campus that contributed to your success?

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Who or what motivates you to strive for success in college? 10. What experiences in college have been most influential to your success?
<p>Session 3: Reflection of Experiences</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reflecting back on your precollege and college experiences, what would you have done differently? 2. Please share some of your high and low points in your precollege and college experiences. 3. What are the factors that impacted your ability to succeed in college? 4. Discuss how your overall experiences influenced your decision to strive for success. 5. Was there anything that you had to change about yourself to be successful? If so, please explain. 6. Do you consider yourself a role model? If so, please elaborate. 7. What specific practices directly contributed to your success in college? 8. What do you feel is unique about being a FGAA male student? 9. What is the best part about attending an HBCU? 10. What new programs and/or services should SSU implement for future FGAA male students?

APPENDIX G:
Institutional Review Board Approval



**Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants**

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 03439-2016

INVESTIGATOR: Ms. Curdedra Andrews

PROJECT TITLE: *Breaking Barriers: Successfully Retaining First Generation African American Male Students at a Historically Black College & University.*

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under Exemption **Category 2**. You may begin your study immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- *Upon completion of your research all data must be kept securely (locked cabinet/password protected computer, etc.) for a minimum of 3 years.*
- *In order to document and establish participant understanding - start audio/video recorder & read the consent statement aloud, ask participants whether they have questions/concerns regarding research project.*

If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.

Elizabeth W. Olphie *01/17/2017*
Elizabeth W. Olphie, IRB Administrator Date

**Thank you for submitting an IRB application.
Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.**