ABSTRACT

ALLEN, JEFFREY LEE. A Q-methodology Study of African American Male Perceptions of the Factors that Contribute to their Persistence at a Rural Community College. (Under the direction of Dr. Michelle Bartlett).

The persistence of African American males enrolled at a community college is critical to achievement of their academic goals. The purpose of this study was to understand the viewpoints of African American males concerning the factors they believe contributed to their success in persisting toward achieving their academic goals while enrolled at a rural community college. Many studies about African American male persistence focus on the obstacles and barriers students face that impact their persistence and completion. This study took a different approach and utilized an anti-deficit achievement framework to identify and examine the factors that contributed to African American male persistence at a rural community college according to their own perspective utilizing Q-methodology. Nineteen African American males who were currently enrolled at a rural community college participated in the study. A post-survey questionnaire was administered to the participants upon completion of the Q-sort to gather demographic information and gain insight from the participants concerning their rankings of statements. The data analysis revealed five viewpoints participants considered being contributing factors toward their persistence of achieving their academic goals at a rural community college.

A Q-methodology Study of African American Male Perceptions of the Factors that
Contribute to their Persistence at a Rural Community College

by
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my work to my daughter, Allyson Allen. I want you to know you can accomplish anything you put your mind to. I also would like to dedicate my work to my mom who raised me by herself and showed me the value of hard work.

BIOGRAPHY

Jeffrey Allen is a dean at a community college in the southeast and has oversight of advising, college success courses, testing, disability services, student activities, athletics, and tutoring. He is a strong advocate for student success, equity, and providing excellent service to all stakeholders. Jeffrey's professional background includes 14 years of K-12 experience and seven years of higher education experience. His K-12 experience includes being a math teacher, dean of students, interim charter school director, and a private school assistant principal.   His higher education experience includes serving as coordinator of basic skills and a director overseeing such areas as leadership and professional development, student activities, and athletics.

As a community college leader, Jeffrey believes he is in the business of changing lives through education. His own education includes earning a Bachelor of Science in mathematics from North Carolina Central University and a Master of Science in curriculum and instruction from Western Governors University. Jeffrey is currently enrolled in a doctoral program at North Carolina State University where he is in the process of earning a Doctor of Education in adult and community college education. Jeffrey's biggest accomplishment is being a father to his daughter Allyson.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank God for giving me this opportunity and the strength to make it this far in my educational journey. I would like to thank all of the professors that taught me in the Raleigh cohort. I would also like to thank my committee and my wonderful advisor Dr. Michelle Bartlett for supporting me through this process.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Community colleges serve a diverse community of learners across the country. Many of these learners begin their postsecondary education at a community college with the goal of earning a degree or credential that will lead to a sustainable wage. Community colleges educate approximately 4% of the entire U.S. population, which is equivalent to 13 million students each year (Wyner, 2014). With their open-door mission, community colleges provide an opportunity to many students who are underserved and underrepresented. These students benefit from the low tuition, small class sizes, and supportive environments that many community colleges can deliver. However, many students enter a community college and never complete a program of study or earn a credential (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). In fact, only approximately four in 10 students complete any type of degree or certificate within six years at a community college (Juszkiewicz, 2017).

Low-income and minority students are less likely than other subgroups to receive a college degree (Wyner, 2014). Minority males are a significant portion of the population that may not earn a college degree. Many minority males have the goal of improving their quality of life through a postsecondary education. Of all African American and Hispanic males who begin their experiences in public postsecondary intuitions, 71% enroll in community colleges (Harrison & Palacios, 2014). Bush and Bush (2010) stated that minority males enroll in community colleges because they feel these institutions will provide them the opportunity for upward social and economic mobility; however, less than a third of African American and Hispanic men, 32% and 30% respectively, earn a degree or credential in six years at a community college (Wood & Harris, 2017). There are also many community colleges with completion rates for minority males in the single digits (Wood & Harris, 2017).

For the African American male population, enrollment rates at community colleges are proportional to the African American male adult population in the U.S.; however, college attainment rates fall short of those numbers (Kim & Hargrove 2013). In 2002, African American men comprised only 4.3% of students enrolled in postsecondary education, the same percentage as in 1976 (Harper, 2012). According to Harper (2012), African American male completion rates are the lowest among both the sex and ethnic subgroups in U.S. higher education. African American males are not achieving success academically; therefore, they are not accomplishing their educational goal of completing a degree or credential. With these alarming statistics concerning minority males, community colleges must address equity outcomes concerning this population.

With low tuition costs and small classes, African American males benefit from enrolling in a community college environment (Mason, 1998). At many North Carolina community colleges, African American males are one of the lowest performing and underrepresented ethnic subgroups (North Carolina Community College System [NCCCS], 2017). The equity outcomes concerning African American males at North Carolina community colleges is a problem. Many African American males begin college with the goal of earning a degree or credential to better their lives, but many of them do not accomplish that goal for various reasons. Whether it is not having the right support structure, not being prepared for college-level work, or a lack of motivation, African American males are not persisting equitably toward the completion of a degree. According to the 2018 North Carolina Performance Measures Report, there is a significant gap in completion rates concerning African American males and other subgroups. Caucasian males had a completion rate of 44%, while African American males had a completion rate of 31% (NCCCS, 2018). With African American males having the lowest

completion rate of all ethnic subgroups, community colleges must determine the factors that enable African American males to be successful and implement strategies to close the gap in achievement.

Problem Statement

Community colleges serve a diverse community of learners because of their open-door admission policies (Wyner, 2014). This open-door admission policy, coupled with low tuition and geographic proximity, make community colleges accessible for many, including first generation college students and those who are underserved (Ma & Baum, 2016). A specific population that is underserved and underrepresented in community colleges is minority males, particularly African Americans (Wood & Harris, 2017).

Low progression rates of African American male students may influence their persistence to completion. Progression rates are defined as the percentage of first-time students who attempt, and successfully complete, 12 hours within their first academic year (NCCCS, 2017). According to the 2017 North Carolina Performance Measures Report, African American male progression rates for community college were the lowest of any ethnic subgroup. The 2017 North Carolina Performance Measure Report indicated that the African American male progression rate was 50% percent, whereas the Caucasian male progression rate for the same cohort was significantly higher at 71%. There is a significant gap in achievement with African American males and other ethnic/gender subgroups in the NCCCS. The 2018 North Carolina Performance Measures Report indicated that African American males had a progression rate of 49%, while the progression rate of Caucasian males was 72%. These data show there is a persistent and significant gap in achievement between African American and Caucasian males. In addition, there is a significant gap in achievement concerning completion rates of African

American males and other ethnic groups. According to the 2018 North Carolina Performance Measure Report, African American males had a completion rate of 31% compared to Caucasian males at 44% and Hispanic males at 42%

At the national level, the discussion of success within the minority male population is steadily increasing. There have been significant research articles, reports, and books focused on minority male success (Wood & Harris, 2017). Various factors have been found to impact African American males' progression to completion. For example, African American males indicate they leave college for myriad reasons, including program dissatisfaction or family responsibilities (Wood, 2012). Environmental factors, such as the hours worked at a job or finances to pay for college, may also contribute to why African American males are not progressing toward completion (Wood & Williams, 2013). No matter the factor, African American male students run the risk of not maintaining enrollment at the college. If this problem is not addressed, many African America males will enter community colleges with aspirations of earning a degree or credential, but many will not persist to achieve their goal.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of African American males concerning the factors they believe contributed to their success as they persisted to completion at a rural North Carolina community college. For this research, the term persistence refers to a student who attempts and completes credit hours from semester to semester at a community college. This study utilized a Q-methodology approach to gather and analyze the viewpoints of African American males concerning factors that contributed to their persistence in achieving their academic goals. In Q-methodology, researchers gather data in the form of opinions from participants' point of view on a subjective topic (Bartlett & DeWeese, 2014).

Many studies concerning the academic success of African American males at community colleges either focus on explanations of why the students were not successful or the institution's interpretation as to why the students were not successful. This study took a different approach by focusing on the factors that contributed to their success. Through this study, as the researcher, I gathered and analyzed data from the students' point of view about the factors they believe contributed to their success while enrolled at a rural community college. This information will be beneficial to community college administrators in developing strategies that will support the African American male population, as well as other minority males.

Research Question

This study used an anti-deficit achievement perspective to frame the research question. A Q-methodology approach was utilized to answer the research question and examine the factors that enabled African American males to be successful in persisting to the completion of a degree or credential at a rural community college. The following research question served as the foundation of the study: What are the viewpoints of African American males about the factors that contributed to their persistence toward completing their academic goals at a rural community college?

Theoretical Framework

This study sought to understand the perceptions of African American males at a rural community college concerning factors they believe contributed to their success in progressing toward completing a degree or credential at a rural community college. Studies that examine the persistence of African American males at a community college typically take a deficit approach by identifying factors that negatively affected their persistence to completing a degree or credential. This study took another approach and utilized Harper's (2012) anti-deficit

achievement framework, which allowed me to focus the study's research on why African American males were successful, rather than why they were failing. In addition, this study utilized self-efficacy, academic resilience, and grit as theoretical lenses to analyze the viewpoints of the participants.

The anti-deficit achievement framework inverts questions commonly asked about educational disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation, academic underperformance, disengagement, and African American male student attrition, which invites participants to focus on the factors that contribute to their success, rather than the barriers they face in persistence (Harper, 2012). Table 1 demonstrates the difference in framing questions concerning the success of African American males in higher education.

Harper's (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework assists researchers, educators, and administrators with understanding the success of Black males in higher education. Oftentimes, research concerning African American males focuses on male attrition and academic underperformance. Harper's (2012) anti-deficit approach takes a different perspective. In a study of Black males who were successful in STEM courses, Harper (2010) utilized the framework to reframe questions for the study to determine the factors that contributed to the success of African American males in STEM courses. Guided by this anti-deficit achievement framework, researchers can evaluate factors that contribute to the success of African American males in higher education, rather than focus on the barriers that inhibit African American male persistence and completion.

Table 1
Deficit-Oriented Versus Anti-Deficit-Oriented Questions

Deficit-Oriented Questions	Anti-Deficit Reframing
Why do so few African American male students enroll in college?	How were aspirations for postsecondary education cultivated among African American male students who are currently enrolled in college?
Why are African American male undergraduates so disengaged in campus leadership positions and out-of-class activities?	What compels African American undergraduate men to pursue leadership and engagement opportunities on their campuses?
Why are African American male students' grade point averages often the lowest among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups on many campuses?	What resources are most effective in helping African American male achievers earn GPAs above 3.0 in a variety of majors, including STEM fields?
Why are African American men's relationships with faculty and administrators so weak?	How do African American men go about cultivating meaningful, value-added relationships with key institutional agents?

Note. Adapted from *Black male student success in higher education: A report from the National Black Male College Achievement Study*, by S. R. Harper, 2012, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education.

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief about one's capability to produce designated levels of performance (Bandura, 1993). It is the personal determination of one's own ability to deal with a certain task (Sharm & Nasa, 2014). Self-efficacy is important to one's ability to accomplish a goal or task and a strong sense of self-efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being (Bandura, 1993). Self-efficacy beliefs also influence an individual's choices, effort, persistence, and resilience.

Self-efficacy is a term that was defined by Albert Bandura over 40 years ago. Self-efficacy is not the same as ability or motivation; rather, it is one's personal determination about one's own ability to deal with a certain task. Self-efficacy beliefs also set the foundation for human motivation and personal accomplishment (Shama & Nasa, 2014). Self-efficacy has been key in how a person's behavior could be better predicted, based upon the beliefs they hold about their own abilities, rather than what they can truly accomplish. A person's beliefs serve as a foundation for their personal accomplishments (Bandura, 1993). This is very important as a person's level of self-efficacy is important in determining if their actions can produce a result. With a high level of self-efficacy, an individual holds the belief that they are able to attain an outcome they deserve, despite the obstacles that may be presented before them (Sharma & Nasa, 2014).

Self-efficacy is rooted in social cognitive theory. Social cognitive theory suggests that human achievement depends on interactions between one's behaviors, personal factors, and environmental factors (Schunk & Pajares, 2001). A person's belief in their own efficacy influences whether they think pessimistically or optimistically. Self-beliefs influence how well people motivate themselves and persevere in the face of difficulty to achieve the goals they set for themselves (Bandura, 2012).

Academic resilience. Academic resilience is defined as the ability to effectively deal with setbacks, stress, or pressure in the academic setting (Martin, 2002). Gayles (2005) defined academic resilience as academic achievement when such achievement is rare for those facing similar circumstances or within a similar sociocultural background. Academic resilience is also defined as an individual's response to situations of stress and anxiety (Braddock, Royster, Winfield, & Hawkins, 1991). In that context, resilience may be considered an outcome.

Grit and motivation. Motivation is dependent on a person being resilient in accomplishing the goal they have decided to achieve. Without some level of resilience to the challenges that may be presented before an individual, the individual motivational gains may be lost. Unless a student has a certain level of resilience, their motivation may not be enough to overcome academic setbacks, such as excessive study pressures and stress (Martin, 2002).

Resilience and grit are related to one another when the concepts refer to students persisting to completion of their educational goals. Grit is defined by focused passion and consistent interest (Perkins-Gough, 2013) and related to a person's perseverance. Grit is the individual's tendency to be consistent with their interest while perseverance is the tendency to work hard in the face of setbacks (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Although grit is related to resilience, an individual's grit is not based on their setbacks, but more focused on being consistent and not changing their focus.

The anti-deficit achievement framework is used to focus research concerning African American male's achievement in education. This study will utilize this framework, along with the concepts of self-efficacy, academic resilience, and grit to guide and shape the research question and examine the viewpoints of the participants' perspectives.

Conceptual Framework

The focus of this study was to identify factors that contributed to the persistence of African American male students toward achieving their academic goals at a rural community college. The study focused on African American males enrolled at a rural community college. The conceptual framework for the study is shown in Figure 1.
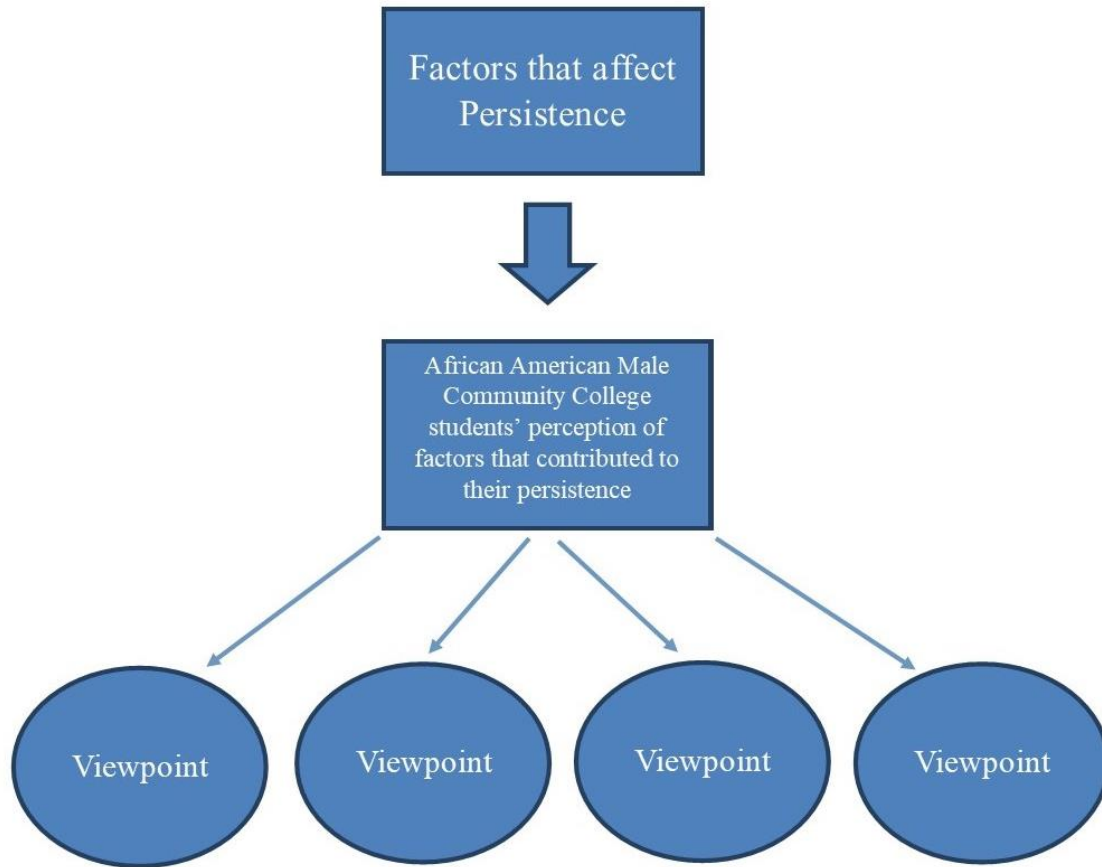
Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

Significance of the Study

  Based on the North Carolina Performance Measures, African American males are the lowest performing ethnic subgroup in the NCCCS for first year progression rates (NCCCS, 2016; 2017; 2018). Oftentimes research focuses on why African American males are not achieving success or the obstacles that prevent them from persisting to completion. This study sought to take a different approach by identifying factors that African American males believe contributed to their own success. The results of the study will assist community college faculty and staff in identifying strategies to support African American male students. The existing literature

concerning factors that affect African American males is meticulous and extensive. However, this study adds to the existing body of literature by seeking to understand African American male's perceptions concerning what enabled them to become successful and persist toward accomplishing their academic goals at a community college.

Delimitations of the Study

The researcher sets the delimitations of a study. One of the delimitations of this study was that participants were students who were enrolled at a rural community college and not an urban community college; therefore, the findings of the study may not relate to African American males who attend an urban community college. In addition, the study was conducted with students who were currently enrolled at a rural community college; hence, currently enrolled student viewpoints may be different from African American males who have graduated. Finally, this study was focused on African American males. The results of this study may not be applicable to other men of color.

Organization of the Study

This study was organized in a traditional five-chapter dissertation format. Chapter 1 presents an overview of African American males in the community college setting and offers the foundational research question for the study. Chapter 2 details a review of the literature about the factors that affect the persistence of African American males, common theoretical frameworks concerning factors that affect persistence of African American male students, and African American males in the community college setting. Chapter 3 describes the research design of the study, details about selecting the sample, and data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 provides the findings of the study and Chapter 5 summarizes the study and discusses any implication for practice and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Summary

African American males are the lowest performing ethnic subgroup concerning first-year progression and completion rates at North Carolina community colleges (NCCCS, 2016; 2017; 2018). Equity outcomes concerning African American males at community colleges is a problem. Many African American males begin college with the aspiration of earning a degree or credential to improve their standard of living, but many do not accomplish this goal for various reasons. Closing the gap in achievement for African American males at the community college level is a necessity. Examining the perceptions African American males have about the factors they believe contributed to their academic success will assist stakeholders in developing strategies to address this issue and enable this subgroup to be as successful as other ethnic subgroups.

In summary, this chapter detailed the problem, provided background information concerning the problem, and provided the purpose, research question, theoretical framework, and organization of the study. Chapter 2 will detail a review of the literature concerning factors that affect the persistence of African American males at a community college.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Low-income and minority students are less likely than other subgroups to receive a college degree (Wyner, 2014; NCCCS, 2019). For many colleges, addressing equity outcomes is an ongoing conversation in which administrators continue to look for new strategies to implement. At many North Carolina community colleges, African American males are one of the lowest performing and underrepresented ethnic subgroups (NCCCS, 2017), which is an equity concern and a problematic issue that must be addressed by many of the institutions in the NCCCS (NCCCS 2017, 2018; 2019). Whether the cause is not having the right support structure, not being prepared for college-level work, or a lack of motivation, African American males are not persisting to completion of their academic goals (Bush & Bush, 2010; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001; Wood 2012; Wood & Williams, 2013). African American males are an at-risk population with the potential of being an endangered population not meeting their potential (Strayhorn, 2012; Wood, 2012; Wood & Williams, 2013).

African American males face many challenges that may inhibit or make uncertain their opportunity for success in higher education (Strayhorn, 2012). Many studies have been conducted to determine the factors that may affect African American male persistence toward completing their academic and career goals; such factors include background traits, academic preparation, environmental factors, psychological factors, and academic outcomes (Glenn 2003; Mason, 1998; Perrakis, 2008; Strayhorn, 2012, Wood & Williams, 2013).

When examining African American males at community colleges, there are many strategies and/or programs colleges have implemented to address various achievement gaps for this population, including academic advising/counseling, academic/study skills, leadership training, and mentoring among other topics (Gardenhire & Cerna, 2016; Glenn, 2003). Many of

the programs are grant funded and have an emphasis on supporting this population during their first year at a community college. There are quite a few community colleges, including those in North Carolina, that have implemented similar programs to address the achievement gaps of minority males to include African American males (Gardenhire & Cerna, 2016).

In North Carolina, first-year progression rates are defined as the percentage of first-time students who attempt and successfully complete 12 hours within their first academic year (NCCCS, 2016). According to the 2017 North Carolina Performance Measures Report, African American male progression rates at North Carolina community colleges are the lowest of any ethnic subgroup. The 2018 North Carolina Performance Measure Report indicated that the African American male progression rate was 49%. The Caucasian male progression rate for the same cohort was 72%. Similarly, the North Carolina Performance Measures Report from 2017 indicated that African American males had a progression rate of 50%, while Caucasian males were at 71%. From the data report, there is a significant gap in achievement between African American males and Caucasian males. If students are unable to complete 12 hours during their first year, they may not have the momentum to persist to completion. Supporting the academic achievement of African American males at the community college level must be a priority that should be addressed. Examining the factors that affect persistence, and developing strategies to address those issues, will enable this subgroup to be as successful as other ethnic subgroups.

From the data listed above, African American Males are not persisting to completion at the same rate they are enrolling in a community college. African American males may benefit from the low tuition and small class sizes at the community college, but they are not progressing to completion.

African American Males in Community College

With its open-door mission, community colleges are viewed as a door of opportunity for students who desire to engage in higher education (Wood, 2012). In fact, 50% of African American males who enter postsecondary education begin at a two-year college (Strayhorn, 2012). They perceive that community colleges can facilitate social and economic advancement and seek out the opportunities at community colleges to pursue a better future for themselves and their families (Wood & Williams, 2013); yet, African American males at many community colleges are an underrepresented and underserved population (Wood & Harris, 2017). African Americans have placed their confidence in the open-door mission and have been let down, as the community college has failed to facilitate their upward mobility and enhanced livelihood (Wood, 2012).

When examining the success of minority males, many community colleges continue to struggle to support them (Wood & Harris, 2017). Many African American males enter higher education through two-year colleges, but few succeed (Wood, 2012). African American males enter two-year colleges older as traditional college students, independent with dependents, married, and with delayed enrollment (Wood, 2013). Many studies have revealed that African American males, along with Latino males, rank near the bottom on most indicators of student success, such as enrollment and persistence at community colleges (Wood & Williams, 2013). Educational scholars who have examined factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males have focused on two areas in their research: 1) individual characteristics and 2) pre-college indicators, including both cognitive and non-cognitive variables (Bush & Bush, 2010). Research shows that African American males face many

challenges that may inhibit or make uncertain their opportunity for success in higher education (Strayhorn 2012).

When examining the retention of African American males at community colleges, access does not appear to be the problem at community colleges. Strayhorn (2012) stated that "persistence, not access is the problem for two-year students" (p. 358). Many authors have stated that 25% of community college students left school after their first semester and success rates were even lower for African American males (Strayhorn, 2012). The topic of retention for African American males in higher education appears in the literature many times; however, most studies concerning African American male postsecondary education have overlooked the community college context (Strayhorn, 2012; Wood & Williams, 2013). In fact, most of the literature concerning African American males refers to enrollment at four-year institutions (Strayhorn, 2012).

The likelihood of success for African American males who attend community college is low (Wood, 2012; Wood & Williams, 2013). Wood & Williams (2013) stated that 11.5% of African American males will depart from a community college within one year of admissions, 48.9% leave after three years, and 83% leave after six years. These are concerning statistics and demonstrate the perceived open door to opportunity in a community college is not a door at all, but merely an entrance to another set of doors that lead to very divergent outcomes (Wood, 2012).

Student Persistence Theoretical Frameworks

There are numerous theoretical frameworks and conceptual models developed to explain why students persist or withdraw from college (Villarreal & García, 2016). Tinto's (1975) theory of departure has served as the theoretical framework for a variety of studies that have used

a myriad of methodologies, including interviews, logistic regression techniques, and focus

groups (Bratton, 2018; Flowers, 2006; Strayhorn 2012; Wood 2012). In addition, critical race

theory has been a theoretical framework in a few studies examining the persistence of African

American males in higher education (Hall, 2017).

   Tinto's theory of departure. One of the most common theoretical frameworks in

research concerned with African American male persistence is Tinto's (1975) theory of

departure.   This theory states that students who socially integrate into the campus community

increase their commitment to the institution and are more likely to graduate (Tinto, 1975). Tinto

also theorized that students depart from an institution for the following reasons: academic

difficulties, inability to resolve their academic and educational goals, and failure to remain

integrated in the academic and social life of the institution (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, &

Hayek, 2006). Tinto's model is used to understand the relationship between student engagement

and its impact on persistence. Many studies that examined the departure of African American

males from a community college utilized Tinto's theory of departure.

   Tinto placed a focus on academic and social integration as it relates to student

persistence. Academic integration relates to the experiences that students participate in to

support academic development, such as supplemental instruction. Social integration are student

experiences that integrate the student into the social environment. Those experiences include

peer to peer and faculty/staff interactions. Tinto proposed, "as the academic and social

integration experiences increases, students tend to have a greater commitment to engagement at

the institution and complete a credential" (Bean, 1983, p. 129).

   Tinto's model considers the effects of precollege characteristics, such as prior schooling

experiences; college experiences, such as the student's college major; and the amount and quality

of the student-faculty interactions (Flowers, 2006). The student departure model created by

Tinto suggests that a student's experience and various responsibilities might impact student

retention and persistence. Figure 2 shows the student departure model and factors that may

affect student retention and persistence.
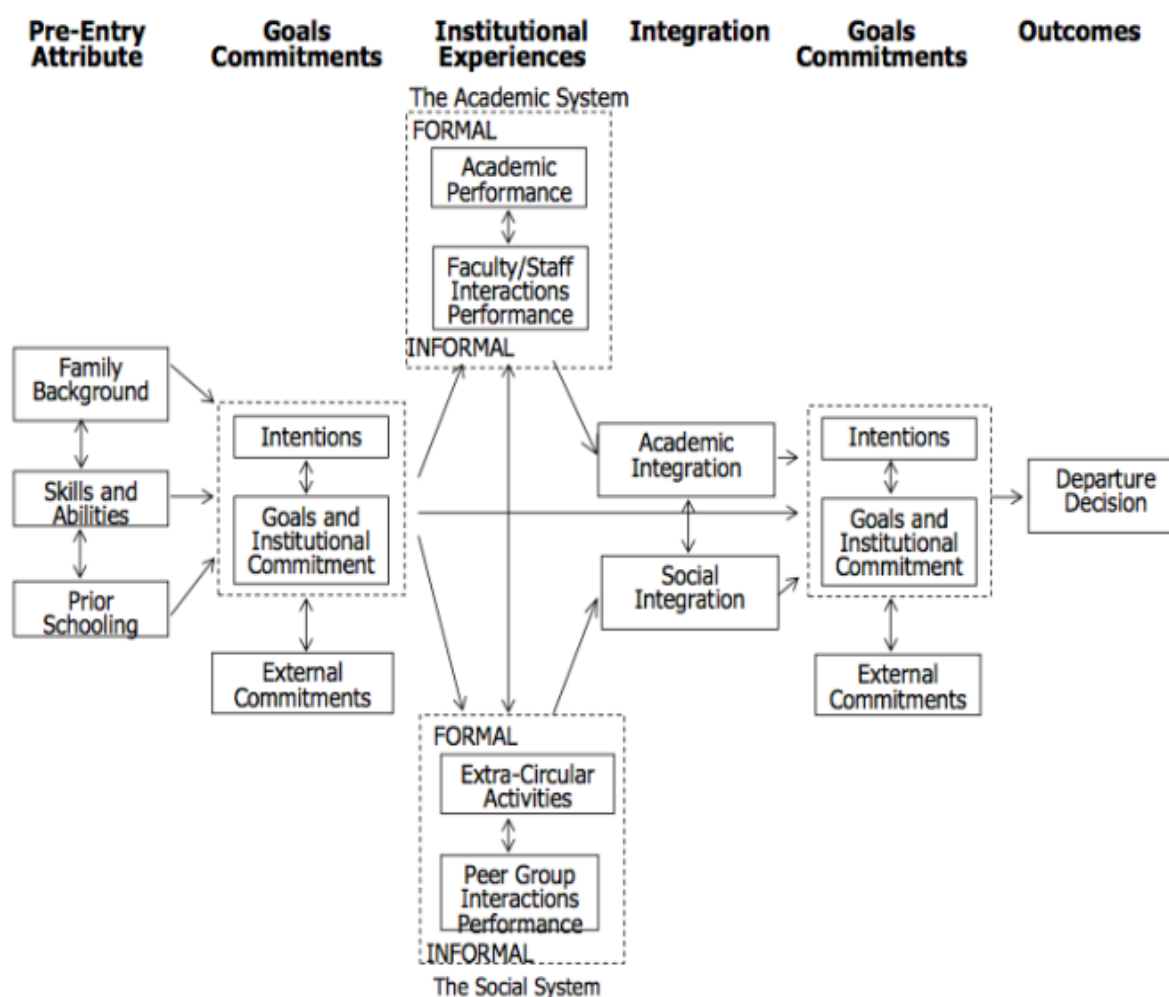
Figure 2. Model of student departure. Reprinted from "Dropout from higher education: A

theoretical synthesis of recent research," by V. Tinto, 1975, *Review of Educational Research,*

45(1), 89-125.

Tinto's (1975) work stated that when students are not adequately socialized or integrated into the college's environment, they depart without earning a credential.   African American males who are committed to an institution are motivated to learn and have an interest in earning a college degree. However, students are less likely to persist to completion when they are not integrated into the academic and social culture of the institution. One researcher utilized Tinto's theory to explore the effects of attending a two-year institution on African American males' academic and social integration in the first year of college and concluded that African American males are more likely to attend a two-year college than a four-year university. However, retention rates for those students are low and completion rates are dismal (Flowers, 2006).

Critical race theory. Another theoretical framework used in studies related to African American male persistence is critical race theory (CRT). CRT is a framework used in the social sciences to examine society and culture as it relates to race, law, and power (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In education, CRT frameworks attempt to foreground race and racism in the research. The CRT framework focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of communities of color and offers a method for examining various discrimination based on race/ethnicity or class.

CRT has five elements:

1.   The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination;

2. The challenge to dominant ideology;

3. The commitment to social justice;

4. The centrality of experiential knowledge; and

5. The transdisciplinary perspective (Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000).

When examining the achievement and progression of African American males, many studies utilized CRT as a lens in higher education. Richardson-Shavers (2007) utilized CRT as the theoretical lens for a dissertation study that examined what keeps African American males from pursuing college degrees. The qualitative study revealed through the lens of CRT that race and class was a theme in why African American males did not want to pursue a college degree. Another study by Bimper, Harrison, and Clark (2013) utilized CRT as theoretical lens to examine the self-perceptions and behaviors of African American male athletes at a predominantly white institution of higher education.

Both Tinto's (1975) theory of student departure and CRT are theoretical frameworks commonly utilized to examine factors that impact African American male persistence toward completing a degree in higher education. These two theoretical frameworks are consistently used to examine factors that affect their persistence at two-year community colleges and four-year universities.

Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework

This study utilized a different perspective in examining the topic of African American male persistence by using the anti-deficit achievement framework. This framework, introduced by Shaun Harper, has been used in studies concerning the factors affecting the achievement of African American males at the university level (Cooper & Hawkins 2016; Goings, 2016; Harper, 2010; Wright, 2013). There are limited studies concerning African American male achievement at the community college level. With the extensive amount of literature concerning factors that affect persistence of African American males at universities, a framework such as anti-deficit achievement approach could be used to examine what makes African American males successful at community colleges (Harper, 2012).

Factors Affecting Persistence of African American Males

There are multiple studies that examine the factors that affect the persistence and retention of African American males at community college. Many of the studies utilized longitudinal data to determine factors that affect persistence at a community college (Flowers, 2006; Hagedorn et al., 2001; Wood, 2012; Wood & Williams, 2013). In addition, there are studies that used data from the Community College Survey of Men (CCSM) or the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) to determine factors that affected persistence of African American males at a community college (Harrison & Palacios, 2014; Strayhorn, 2012; Harris, Wood & Newman, 2015). The literature concerning the persistence of African American males at a community college consists of studies conducted at urban midsize or large community colleges systems (Bush & Bush 2010; Glenn 2003; Harrison & Palacios, 2014; Ingram, Williams, Coaxum, Hilton & Harrell, 2016; Harris et al., 2015; Wood & Turner 2011). The literature concerning African American male persistence at a community college includes various factors, such as pre-college/background institutional factors, environmental factors, and psychological factors. Each of these factors can be used to determine what impacts African American male success in achieving their academic and career goals both positively and negatively. Figure 3 provides a visual representation of a model showing how similar factors affect student success for African American males in community college.

Pre-college/background factors. Pre-college/background factors refer to variables that occur prior to the enrollment of a student in a college and may affect the persistence or academic outcomes of that student (Mason, 1998). These variables include, but are not limited to, educational goals, student age, a student's pre-collegiate academic success, and the educational

level attained by the parents (Wood & Williams, 2013). Below is a summary of literature

concerning variables or factors that are considered pre-college/background factors.

Institutional Factors
* Collegian Support * Faculty Engagement * Social Involvement * Campus Climate

Personal Factors
* Transportation * Life Stability * Family Support * Finances * Employment * Religion * Peer Support

Academic Success

Academic Factors
* Study Habits * Attendance *Academic Services

Psychological Factors
* Motivation * Focus * Academic Confidence

+/-
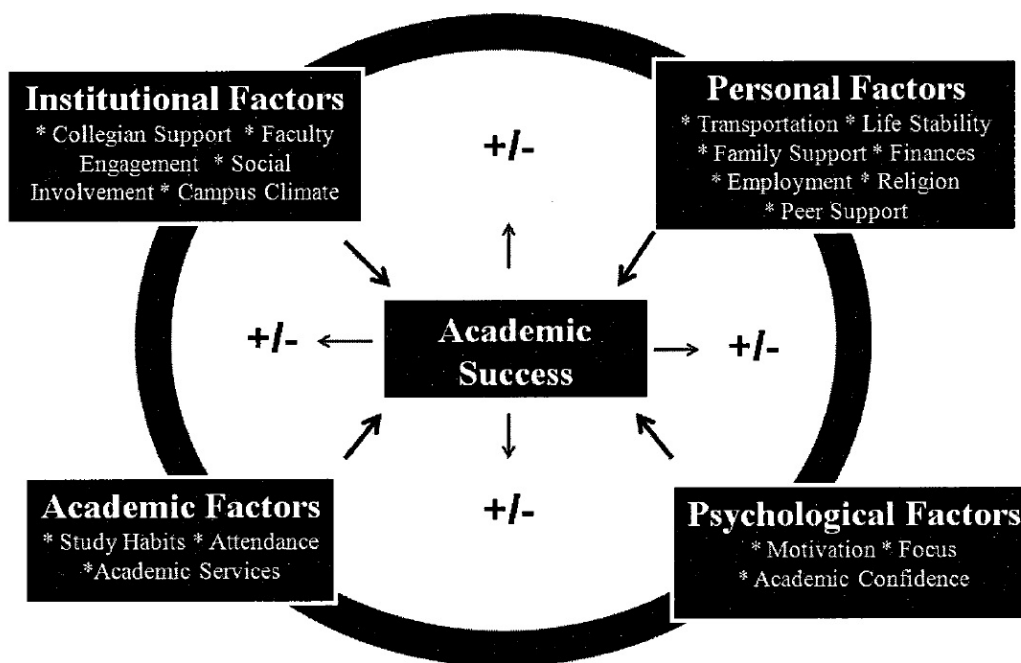
Figure 3. Conceptual model of African American Male academic success in community

colleges. Reprinted from "Leaving the 2-year college: Predictors of Black male collegian

departure. *Journal of Black Studies, 43*(3), 303-326.

Studies have found that high school GPA, test scores, parental educational level, and

positive self-efficacy are correlated to the success of African American males (Bush & Bush,

2010). These pre-college factors may be indicators of a student's level of persistence, or lack

thereof, concerning African American males in their attempt to attain a degree. High school

GPA was found to be a factor in retention in another study (Hagedorn et al., 2001). It is also

suggested that higher attrition rates of African American male students are largely attributed to

their socioeconomic background and to the peculiar characteristics of higher education

institutions, such as what support systems are in place to support at-risk populations (Bush &

Bush, 2010).

In a study conducted by Bush and Bush (2010), the researchers determined that African

American males had the lowest GPA of any ethnic subgroup at a community college. This

finding supported the researchers' hypothesis about the academic achievement of the subgroup at

the college based on pre-college factors such as socioeconomic status or high school GPA. In

addition, African American males are the lowest performing subgroup in most of the

performance indicators within the community college. This suggests there may be many factors

that affect progression rates of African American males at institutions of higher learning beyond

that of community colleges in general.

College preparation may be a factor in persistence for students as well. Radford,

Pearson, Ho, Chambers, and Ferlazzo's (2012) study demonstrated that the more remediation a

student required, the less likely the student was to persist and complete a credential. Harvey

(2010) stated that students who begin in developmental or remediation courses may take longer

to complete and increases the likelihood that the student may not persist to completion.

There are also studies that suggest age is a factor concerning persistence at a community

college. Hagedorn et al. (2001) and Perrakis (2008) found that younger students were more

likely to persist than older students. Socioeconomic status is also a factor concerning persistence

and success of African American male students. African American male students whose parents

were from a higher socioeconomic status may be more likely to complete and accomplish

academic goals (Dougherty & Kienzel, 2006).

Institutional factors. When it comes to institutional factors that affect the persistence of African American males, current literature suggests there is a correlation with support and African American male student achievement. In Bush and Bush's research (2010), peer interaction played a significant role in the persistence and retention of African American males at a community college. Other studies suggest that faculty relationships had an impact on the persistence of African American males enrolled in a community college (Bauer, 2014; Harris et al., 2015; Harrison & Palacios, 2014; Ingram et al., 2016; Wood & Turner, 2011; Wood, 2014). In addition, institutions with large numbers of students who attend full-time had increased graduation rates for African American male students (Vasquez Urias & Wood, 2014). Vasquez Urias and Wood (2015) also found that smaller colleges had higher graduation rates with African American male students.

Many colleges have various programs that seek to engage African American males. These programs seek to improve retention rates within this population. Many of these programs have common activities, such as mentoring, academic advising, and academic and study skills training (Gardenhire & Cerna, 2016). In the Texas Public Community College system, mentoring, pre-enrollment summer programs, and catch-up programs are practices that affect the persistence of African American males who participate (Glenn, 2003). Bratton (2018) stated that positive experiences in programs that involve mentors, advisors, and counselors may have an impact on African American male persistence. In addition, African American male students who were enrolled full-time were more likely to persist than African American male students who were part-time (Hagedon et al., 2001).

Faculty have been identified as a factor in the persistence of African American males in community colleges (Bratton, 2018; Harrison & Palacios, 2014; Ingram et al., 2016; Wood &

Turner, 2011).   A study by Wood and Turner (2011) suggested that faculty relationships matter

when examining persistence of African American males. Faculty members who create a

welcoming environment for students, engage students in the classroom, and show an interest

outside of class have been shown to have a positive impact on the persistence of African

American males (Bratton, 2018; Bush & Bush, 2010; Glenn, 2003; Harrison & Palacios, 2014;

Wood, 2014). In a study conducted by Newman, Wood, and Harris (2015), African American

males who placed greater emphasis on their studies were more likely to perceive a sense of

belonging from faculty members.   In a study conducted by Wood (2014), African American

males may avoid classroom engagement for fear of being perceived by faculty as academically

inferior.

Establishing strong relationships with faculty and administrators was also found to be

critical to the persistence and completion of African American males in a study concerning

students in a STEM program at a historically Black college and university (HBCU; Kim &

Hargrove, 2013). Flowers (2012) also indicated that their level of self-efficacy was influenced

by the supportive environment and relationships with the faculty. African American males

desire to have positive interactions with their peers at the community college (Bush & Bush,

2010). Throughout their first semester, students were required to meet periodically during the

semester for social engagement, leadership development, and reflection to see how their semester

is going. Faculty members were asked to join the learning community at certain times during the

semester to continue to build rapport with the members of the learning community. These

positive faculty interactions have been linked to high persistence rates of African American

males at a community college (Bush & Bush, 2010).

African American males are less likely to utilize resources made available to them in an academic setting. Because they underutilize the resources provided, these students may jeopardize their ability to persist to completion. African American males who attend community colleges are less likely to attend study groups, speak with faculty, or visit an academic advisor than males at a four-year university (Flowers, 2006). More frequently than any other ethnic subgroup, African American males expressed that they were not engaged in class and were less likely to engage in campus activities (Bush & Bush, 2010).

Environmental factors. When examining the literature concerning the persistence of African American males, various environmental factors emerged that affect persistence. African American males are more likely to leave college because of family responsibilities (Wood, 2012). Mason's (1998) model concerning persistence of African American males also suggested that family responsibilities are a factor affecting persistence and found that family responsibilities could be a predictor of persistence both in a negative or positive way. Wood's research (2012) suggested that the odds of African American males departing from school due to family responsibilities were greater than those of their other male counterparts. This may suggest that family responsibility plays a significant role in the motivation of African American males to remain in school. In addition, Wood's (2012) research suggests that family responsibilities serve to have a greater influence in African American male departure with their first year of college.

Other environmental factors have been shown to affect the persistence of African American males at community colleges. Some of these environmental factors include college finances and hopelessness/helplessness (Mason, 1998). Wood and Williams (2013) suggested in their study that the number of hours worked per week affected students' persistence to

completion.   The number of hours worked then impacted how likely African American males were to utilize resources made available to them in an academic setting. Because students who worked many hours did not utilize campus resources, they jeopardized their ability to persist to completion.

Strayhorn's (2008) research concluded that African American males who have socialized with peers of other races were more likely to feel a sense of belonging to the campus and more likely to be retained. Whether it is being active in a student organization and/or with peers, campus engagement is associated with academic success (Strayhorn, 2008). Flowers (2006) found that social integration may have an impact on persistence of African American males at a community college. From the study, African American males who attended a four-year university benefited from high levels of social integration, such as working with peers or being involved in a campus club or activity.

Psychological factors. Prior research from Mason (1998) also indicated that educational goals were strong predictors of persistence among African American males at community colleges. The clearer the students were about what they wanted to achieve, the more likely the students were to persist (Mason, 1998).   Mason (1998) indicated that students who had a clearly articulated goal had a positive approach to their environment. This approach led to lower stress and greater goal commitment, which in turn led to a higher persistence level within this subgroup. The clearer the students were about their goals and the greater depth to which the goal was internalized, made the student more likely to persist to completion (Mason 1998). Wood and Williams (2012) also indicated that educational goals were predictors of persistence. Other psychological factors, such as stressful life events, have been shown to affect the persistence of African American males in a community college setting (Woods & Harris, 2017).

Motivation drives students to actively engage in the learning process (Davis, 2014). Motivation for some African American males included improving their life status or overcoming societal pressures (Davis, 2014; Ingram et al., 2016; Crawford, 2016). In addition, African American male participants said they were motivated by their peers, the idea of being the man of the house, and faculty encouragement (Ingram et al., 2016). Finally, African American males may be affected by their insecurities, such as a fear of failing and helplessness/hopelessness (Mason 1998; Kim 2014).

In conclusion, a survey of the literature concerning the persistence of African American males reveals that this topic is important and requires more attention. Overall, the quantity of research surrounding the persistence of African American males is less focused on the African American male's point of view concerning what affects their persistence to completing a credential or degree.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an introduction of the problem concerning persistence of African American males in community college, an overview of persistence and retention among African American males in a community college setting, theoretical frameworks that are consistent with research concerning persistence of African American males, and a summary of the literature concerning factors that affect the persistence of this population. In Chapter 3, a detailed overview of research methodology for this study will be presented.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a Q-methodology design to examine the viewpoints of African American males concerning factors they believe contributed to their persistence at a rural community college. The P-set for the study was African American males who completed at least 12 hours, earned a 2.0 or higher GPA, and were enrolled at a rural community college at the time of the study. Q-methodology was chosen for this study because of its focus on gauging participant viewpoints on a subject. The research question that was addressed by the study is as follows: What are the viewpoints of African American males about the factors that contributed to their persistence toward completing their academic goals at a rural community college?

Q-Methodology

In Q-methodology, researchers gather data in the form of opinions from participants' point of view on a subjective topic (Barlett & DeWeese, 2015). The method was developed by William Stephenson as a tool for psychologists to use in understanding an individual's subjective viewpoints (Lien, Ruyle & Lopez-Hoffman, 2018). Q-methodology provides a foundation for the systematic study of subjectivity (Brown, 1993). Watts and Stenner (2012) stated that Q-methodology brings qualitative research into quantitative territory.   Bartlett and Deweese (2015) stated that a benefit of Q-methodology is it helps identify the similarities and differences in subjective perceptions across a sample group and describe a variety of subjective viewpoints. There are five steps in conducting a Q-methodology study. The steps are listed below:

1. Develop the concourse

2. Develop a Q-sample or Q-set from the concourse

3. Select participants or P-set

4. Collect the data from the Q-sort

5. Analyze the data

Concourse. Developing the concourse is the first step in Q-methodology. The concourse is the list of items that are used to describe perspectives on specific topics (Bartlett & DeWeese, 2015). The researcher can use a variety of resources to develop possible statements about a subject. Those statements include but are not limited to both observations and experiences of the researcher as well as the literature review.

For this study, the concourse was developed using articles, books, speaking with experts in the field, and my own knowledge of the persistence of African American males at a community college. First, a condition of instruction or question was created to guide me in developing the concourse. The condition of instruction for this study was "What factors are helpful in successfully pursuing a credential or degree at a community college?" The condition of instruction was used to develop possible statements for the concourse. I began developing the concourse by reviewing notes from articles, information from practitioners in the field, and my own personal knowledge. The concourse for this study consisted of over 90 statements that were related to possible factors that contributed to the success of African American males at a community college. The statements were used to develop the Q-sample or Q-set that was used in the study.

Q-sample. The next step in the Q-methodology is to define the Q-sample or Q-set. The Q-set is defined as a list of items that participants sort to describe their perspectives toward a topic or subject (Previte, Pini & Haslam-Mckenzie, 2007). The Q-set is developed from the concourse by deleting statements that are repetitive or ambiguous. The final step in developing the Q-set is to categorize the statements into themes.

For this study, the Q-sample or Q-set was developed from a concourse of over 90 statements. Upon reviewing the concourse, the researcher began to develop the Q-set by combining and eliminating statements that were similar in nature. For example, statements that referred to addressing non-academic needs, such having access to transportation or food, were combined into one statement for the final Q-set. Also, statements that did not pertain to the overall purpose of the study were eliminated. The final Q-set for this study consisted of 40 statements. The Q-set is listed in Appendix A. The final Q-set was reviewed by practitioners in the field, faculty, and staff to ensure the list was comprehensive for the study.

P-set. The next step in a Q-methodology is to select the participants or P-set. Current literature recommends the researcher must select individuals that are familiar with and have an opinion of the subject matter being studied (Bartlett & DeWeese, 2015). According to Watts and Stenner (2012), Q-methodology has little interest in taking head counts or generalizing to a population of people. In fact, a large number of participants are not required to conduct a Q-methodology study, as the research design does not require large samples to develop themes of subjectivity (Bartlett & DeWeese, 2015).

This study consisted of 19 African American males who had at least a 2.0, earned at least 12 hours, and were currently enrolled at a rural community college at the time of the study. The participants were invited through email to participate. I actively recruited participants by working with faculty and student services staff to identify students who met the criteria for the study.

Q-sort. After the P-set is identified**,** the next step is to administer the Q-sort. Participants are given a set of specific sorting instructions called a condition of instruction along with an answer sheet to record the rank ordering (Bartlett & DeWeese, 2015). In addition, each

participant is given Q-sort guidelines that explain the process. Each participant reads each

statement from the Q-sort and places the statement into one of three piles. One pile is for

statements the participant agrees with, one pile is for statements the participant disagrees with,

and the last pile is a neutral pile. Next, the participants sort the agree and disagree piles further

using a Q-sort grid. This process can be conducted face to face with the researcher, through a

pencil and paper survey, or in an online environment (Bartlett & DeWeese, 2015). Figure 4

shows a sample of a Q-sort grid.

Figure 4. Sample Q-sort grid. Reprinted from "qmethod: A package to explore human

perspectives using Q methodology," by A. Zabala, 2014, *The R Journal, 6*(2), p. 2.

Correlation, factor analysis and factor scores. The first step in analyzing the Q-sort is

the calculation of the correlation matrix. The correlation matrix allows the associations between

all of a series of variables to be observed. The process represents the level of (dis)agreement

between the individual sets (Bartlett & DeWeese, 2015), which can also be understood as the

points of view demonstrated by participants.   The next step in analyzing the Q-sort data is a

factor rotation. This process allows the researcher a method to examine the respondents'

opinions and views from different perspectives. The factor rotation also shifts the perspective

which provides a method to make the output easier to understand.

During the factor analysis stage, a large number of variables are reduced to a smaller

number of factors. This allows for interpretation of the factor scores. These factor scores are

represented by whole numbers which are similar to the one's participants used in the sorting

process. These factor arrays allow the researcher to begin data interpretation and theme

development. When examining the arrays, the researcher is able to determine which statements

are similar and which are diverse.

Q -Methodology Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to aid readers in understanding several key terms

used in Q-methodology.

Concourse is a list of items used to describe perspectives on specific topics (Bartlett &

DeWeese, 2015).

Condition of instruction are instructions pertaining to the Q-sort (Watts & Stenner, 2012)

Factor is a term that represents groupings of people with similar patterns of response

during the sorting (Bartlett & DeWeese, 2015).

Factor loading indicates each respondent's correlation with each of the identified clusters

or factors (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Factor score is the score for a statement that serves as an average of the scores given to that statement by all the Q-sorts associated with the factor (Brown, 1993).

Q-set is defined as the list of items that a group of individuals sort to describe their perspectives toward a topic (Barlett & DeWeese, 2015).

P-set is the participant group for the Q-sort (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Q-methodology is a method developed by William Stephenson as to tool to understand an individual's subjective viewpoints (Lien et al., 2018).

Q-sort is a term to describe each participant's rank-ordered perception of a phenomenon (Bartlett & DeWeese, 2015).

Data Collection Procedures

Upon approval of North Carolina State University's Institutional Review Board, the study was conducted at a rural community college. The participants for the study were African American males who completed at least 12 hours, earned a 2.0 or higher GPA, and were currently enrolled at a rural community college at the time of the study. The process of conducting the Q-sort was done in person. Participants were asked to participate via email. At the beginning of the Q-sort, participants were given instructions concerning the Q-sort and given the opportunity to complete a post-sort survey. In addition to rank ordering statements, participants were given the opportunity to reflect on their thought process and provide any insight to their viewpoints. They were given the opportunity to explain their reasoning for the ranking, as well provide input concerning what items should have been added or were out of place utilizing the post-sort survey. For this study, the following steps were utilized to collect the data:

1. Participants were given an informed consent form to be signed prior to the study beginning.

2. Upon completion of the informed consent form, participants were given the Q-sort instructions.

3. Participants read over the instructions and the researcher reviewed the instructions with the participants as well.

4. The participants began the sort by reviewing the forty statements printed on forty different cards.

5. Next, the participants organized the 40 cards into three piles—agree, disagree, and neutral statements.

6. Participants ranked the cards by placing them in a Q-sort grid that was similar to the figure above.

7. Upon completion of ranking the cards in the 3 X 3 Q-sort grid, the participants completed the 8 ½ by 11 Q-sort data collection grid by writing the number of the statements that corresponded to the placement of the card in 3 X 3 Q-sort grid.

8. Finally, the participant completed the post-sort questionnaire.

9. The researcher collected all the materials for the participants and secured their data according to research protocols.

Data Analysis

The data from the Q-sort was collected and analyzed. Factor analysis was used to develop similar groupings based on similar sorts. Similar sorts are defined by correlations between the sorts (Lien et al., 2018). Factor analysis provides idealized sorts representing each factor group (Lien et al., 2018). Finally, a qualitative interpretation of the ranking of statements

by each factor group was used for understanding the similarities and differences across groups (Lien et al., 2018).   For the proposed study, the data was analyzed in the following way:

1. Data collected was analyzed using Ken-Q software.

2. Viewpoints were identified.

3. Highs, lows, consensus, and distinguishing statements were examined and reported.

4. Post-survey questionnaires by viewpoint were read.

5. Viewpoints were named.

Ethical Considerations

Q-methodology research involves gathering data in the form of opinions from participants' point of view on a subjective topic (Stenner, Watts & Worrell, 2008). Therefore, human subjects were involved. Prior to conducting the study, approval from North Carolina State University's Institutional Review Board and permission to conduct research at a rural community college were obtained.

Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter provided an overview of the research method chosen for this study.   A Q-methodology approach was selected as it helps identify the similarities and differences in subjective perceptions across a sample group and describes a variety of subjective viewpoints (Bartlett & DeWeese, 2015). This chapter described how data collection was collected in order to analyze the perceptions of African American males concerning the factors they believe contributed to their success during their first year at a rural community college. Q-methodology produced two types of data for this study by providing both quantitative and qualitative data (Lien et al., 2018). Chapter 4 presents a detailed analysis of the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The objective of this Q-methodology study was to gain knowledge about the perceptions of African American male students enrolled in a rural community college concerning the factors that contributed to their persistence toward their academic goals. This chapter presents the data that was collected and analyzed to answer the following research question: What are the viewpoints of African American males about the factors that contributed to their persistence toward completing their academic goals at a rural community college?

To answer the research question, nineteen African American male students from a rural community college in North Carolina completed the Q-sort to explore their perceptions and viewpoints about the factors that contributed to their persistence toward their academic goals. The participants sorted a Q-set of 40 statements based on a review of literature, feedback from professionals, and my own personal knowledge. The participants were asked to sort the Q-set statements based on their perceptions of factors that contributed to their persistence in achieving their academic goals while enrolled at a rural community college. The post-sort questionnaire asked each participant to provide information about why they ranked a statement as "most agreed" or most disagreed."

The remainder of this chapter presents an overview of the analysis, correlation matrix, factor analysis, eigenvalues, factor loadings, factor arrays, and distinguishing statements. A description of the demographics will also be displayed, as well as data showing the highest and lowest ranked statements for each group.

Demographics

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics of the participants. All participants were African American male students enrolled in a rural community college.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

	N	%
Gender		
Male	19	100%
Race		
African American	19	100%
Age		
18-24	14	74%
24-40	4	21%
40+	1	5%
Credits Earned		
12-24	5	26%
24-40	9	48%
40+	5	26%
First-Generation		
Yes	6	32%
Enrollment Status		
Full-time	15	79%
Part-time	4	21%

Overview of Analysis

In Q-methodology, researchers gather data in the form of opinions from participants' point of view on a subjective topic (Barlett & DeWeese, 2015). The method was developed by William Stephenson as a tool for psychologists to use in understanding an individual's subjective viewpoints (Lien et al., 2018). Q-methodology provides a foundation for the systematic study of subjectivity (Brown, 1993). Watts and Stenner (2012) stated that Q-methodology brings qualitative research into quantitative territory. Bartlett and Deweese (2015) stated that a benefit of Q-methodology is it helps identify the similarities and differences in subjective perceptions across a sample group and describe a variety of subjective viewpoints.

The Q-sort was conducted manually by the participants. A 3 X 3 Q-sort grid was used to place the 40 statements into each box. Each statement card was assigned a number and place on an index card. The number designated on each statement card had no correlation to anything, rather it was used as a mechanism to track the statements. Upon completion of the sort, the participants transferred the statements identified in each box onto an 8 ½ X 11 letter blank Q-sort grid. Afterward, participants were asked to complete a post-sort questionnaire (see Appendix B). The following questions were included on the post-questionnaire:

1. Why did you place your "very strongly agree" card under +5?

2. Why did you place your "very strongly disagree" card under -5?

3. Were there specific statements that you had difficulty placing?

4. What had the greatest impact on how you sorted your cards the way you did?

5. Is there a statement that you would have like to see in the sort?

After the data were collected and manually entered into an Excel spreadsheet, those data were cleaned and converted to a csv file that was imported into CRAN-R for analysis. Due to a participant who loaded negatively, the data was analyzed in Ken-Q software because of its ability to split a factor based on a negative load. The web-based program Ken-Q was used to compute the factor analysis, correlation matrix, factor analysis, eigenvalues, factor loadings factor arrays, and any consensus and distinguishing statements. From the output of the data, five factor groups were selected.

Factor Analysis and Eigenvalues

The data from this study were processed using a web-based program called Ken-Q software. Initially, four factors were used to analyze the viewpoints and consensus and distinguishing statements. The decision to use four factors was based on the eigenvalues being

more than 1.0, which was significant. Upon review of the factors, it was discovered that one participant factored into Factor Group 2 negatively; therefore, I completed a process called a bipolar factor split to remove the negative factor and form two new factor groups: 2a and 2b.

Table 3 shows the range of the eigenvalues for the five factors which was 1.45 to 5.52. The variance explained was a total of 66% for all responses and reliability between the factor groups ranged from 0.8 to 0.95, which is considered a reliable score.

Table 3

Factor Characteristics Eigenvalues

Factor Group	Average Reliability Coefficient	Number of Loading Q Sort	Eigenvalues	Variance Explained	Reliability	Standard Error of Factor Scores
Factor 1	0.8	5	5.52	29	0.95	0.22
Factor 2a	0.8	2	1.96	10	0.89	0.33
Factor 2b	0.8	1	1.96	10	0.8	0.44
Factor 3	0.8	2	1.62	9	0.89	0.33
Factor 4	0.8	5	1.45	8	0.95	0.22

In additions to reviewing Table 3, a scree plot was created and reviewed to visualize the dimension of the data (see Figure 5).
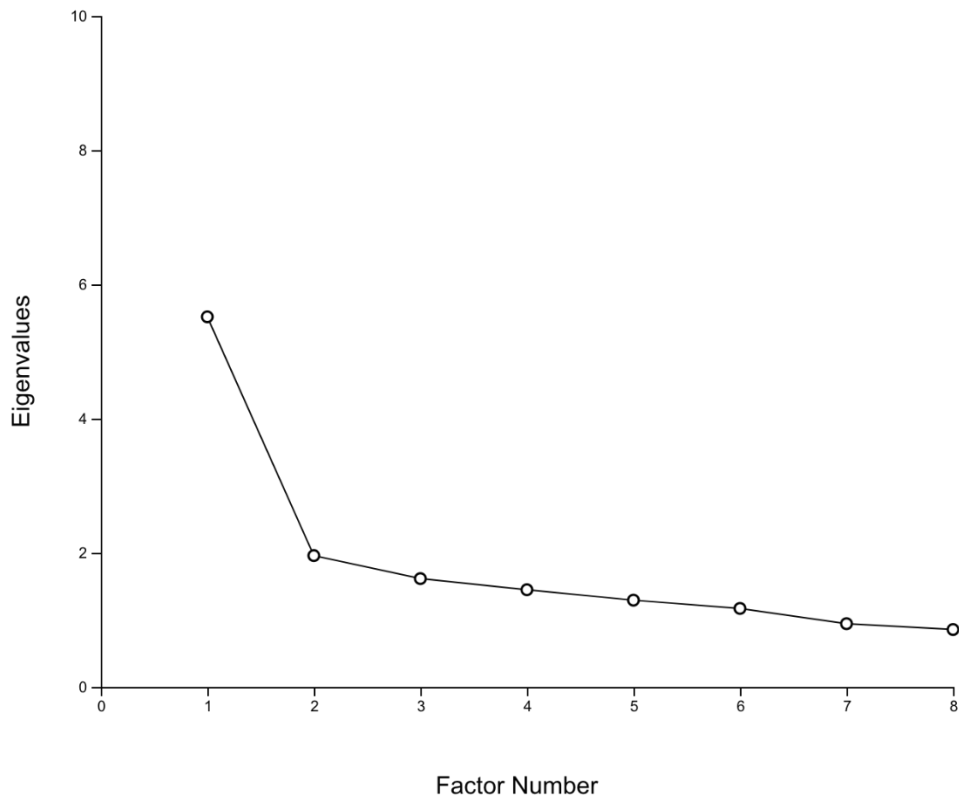
Figure 5. Scree plot of unrotated factors.

Correlation Matrix

A correlation matrix was developed to measure the strength of similarity between factor groups. Table 4 shows how each factor group was related to the other. The two groups with the strongest correlation were Factor Groups 1 and 4 with a correlation of 0.44. The two groups with the weakest correlations were Factors 2a and 2b with a correlation of -0.30. This demonstrated that Factor Group 1 and 4 had the most similarity and Factor Groups 2a and 2b had the most dissimilarity.

Table 4

Correlation Matrix

	F1	F2a	F2b	F3	F4
F1	1.00				
F2a	0.21	1.00			
F2b	0.12	-0.30	1.00		
F3	0.11	0.24	-0.02	1.00	
F4	0.44	0.17	0.15	0.17	1.00

Factor Loadings

Factor loadings were used to determine the extent each Q-sort was similar or dissimilar. Tables 5 and 6 show factor loadings were used to examine how the participants factored into the five groups. The tables indicate that five participants factored into Factor Group 1, two participants factored into Factor Group 2a, one participant factored into Factor Group 2b, two participants factored into Factor Group 3, and five participants factored into Factor Group 4.

Table 5

Factor Loadings

	Factor 1	Factor 2a	Factor 2b	Factor 3	Factor 4
P01	0.59	-0.11	0.11	0.250	0.52
P02	0.69	0.17	-0.17	0.236	-0.09
P03	0.06	0.64	-0.64	0.197	0.33
P04	0.02	0.10	-0.10	0.82	-0.06
P05	0.32	0.36	-0.36	-0.02	0.25
P06	0.53	-0.22	0.22	0.50	0.24
P07	0.19	-0.09	0.09	0.35	0.51
P08	0.12	-0.66	0.66	0.14	0.16
P09	0.25	0.09	-0.09	0.03	0.58
P10	0.43	-0.34	0.34	0.56	0.24
P11	0.53	0.28	-0.28	0.05	0.54
P12	0.58	-0.15	0.15	-0.09	0.12
P13	0.11	0.68	-0.68	0.09	-0.00
P14	0.67	0.18	-0.18	0.04	0.45
P15	-0.07	0.03	-0.03	0.12	0.62
P16	0.79	0.10	-0.10	0.03	-0.05
P17	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.02	0.70
P18	0.60	-0.05	0.05	-0.09	0.64
P19	-0.14	0.35	-0.35	0.59	0.27

Table 6

Flagged Factor Loadings

	Factor One	Factor Two (A)	Factor Two (B)	Factor Three	Factor Four
P01	True	False	False	False	False
P02	True	False	False	False	False
P03	False	True	False	False	False
P04	False	False	False	True	False
P05	False	False	False	False	False
P06	False	False	False	False	False
P07	False	False	False	False	True
P08	False	False	True	False	False
P09	False	False	False	False	True
P10	False	False	False	False	False
P11	False	False	False	False	False
P12	True	False	False	False	False
P13	False	True	False	False	False
P14	True	False	False	False	False
P15	False	False	False	False	True
P16	True	False	False	False	False
P17	False	False	False	False	True
P18	False	False	False	True	True
P19	False	False	False	False	False

In table 7, the factor loading for each participant is shown. Factor Group 1 had five participants that significantly loaded with factors ranging from 0.58 to 0.79. Factor Group 2 was split into two factors because one of the participants loaded as a negative factor in the original Factor Group 2; therefore, that factor was split using a bipolar factor technique. Factor Groups 2 became Factors 2a and 2b. This allowed the negative factor to factor into another group—Factor Group 2B.   Factor Group 2a loaded with two participants with factors ranging from 0.64 to 0.68. Factor Group 2b loaded with only one participant with a factor load of 0.66. Factor Group 3 loaded with two participants with factors ranging from 0.59 to 0.82. Finally, Factor Group 4 loaded with five participants with factors ranging from 0.51 to 0.70.

Table 7

Factor Loading

Participant ID	Factor 1	Factor 2A	Factor 2B	Factor 3	Factor 4
P1	0.59				
P2	0.69				
P12	0.58				
P14	0.67				
P16	0.79				
P3		0.64			
P13		0.68			
P8			0.66		
P4				0.82	
P19				0.59	
P7					0.51
P9					0.58
P15					0.62
P17					0.70
P18					0.64

Factor Arrays

Factor arrays were used to analyze the data from the Q-sort. This Q-sort captured the

viewpoints of African American males enrolled in a rural community college to determine their

perceptions of what factors contributed to persistence toward their academic goals. The sort

required a forced distribution from most disagree -5, to most agree +5, with all other responses

falling in between. There was one statement with all positive scores across all factors and one statement with all negative scores across all factors.

Table 8

Factor Arrays

Statement	F1	F2A	F2B	F3	F4
1	-1	-3	2	-5	2
2	1	0	5	1	5
3	1	1	-2	1	1
4	0	-1	-1	-1	2
5	3	-1	4	-4	-4
6	4	1	-5	0	3
7	-1	-1	-2	-3	-1
8	3	0	-3	-2	3
9	-1	4	-1	1	-3
10	-2	5	-3	-1	-3
11	-1	0	2	3	4
12	0	-1	1	-1	-1
13	-5	-1	0	0	1
14	0	2	0	1	0
15	-2	0	0	-3	-2
16	-3	1	-1	-2	-2
17	5	1	3	0	3
18	2	1	1	-1	4

Table 8 continued

19	1	-5	3	1	-4
20	1	-1	3	0	1
21	4	3	0	2	0
22	0	3	-2	2	2
23	2	2	1	3	2
24	-1	1	-1	2	-1
25	-3	0	1	-1	-2
26	-4	-2	0	-1	-3
27	0	-4	2	-2	0
28	-2	0	1	4	2
29	-2	-2	0	-2	-2
30	-4	-2	-1	-3	0
31	-2	-2	-3	2	-5
32	-3	-2	2	0	-1
33	0	-3	-4	0	-2
34	3	4	4	2	0
35	2	3	-1	-2	-1
36	2	2	-2	-4	1
37	-1	2	-2	4	0
38	1	-3	1	1	1
39	1	-4	2	3	1
40	2	2	-4	5	-1

Consensus Statements

The analysis conducted for this Q-sort revealed five consensus statements. Consensus statements are statements that loaded with similarity across all five factors. The five statements are listed in Table 9. Statement 23 had positive rankings across all factor groups.

Table 9

Factor Arrays with Consensus Statement

	F1	F2A	F2B	F3	F4
3. Advisors holding you accountable	1	1	-2	1	1
7. Being an active member of a club/organization	-1	-1	-2	-3	-1
12. Faculty that look like me	0	-1	1	-1	-1
14. Feeling I belong here	0	2	0	1	0
23. Knowing where to go for help	2	2	1	3	2
29. Participating in an orientation program	-2	-2	0	-2	-2

Factor Group 1: Focus Driven

This factor group had a total of five participants, which was 26% of the total number of participants. Three of the participants reported earning between 24–48 credits and two participants reported earning 48 credits or more at the time of completing the study. Four

participants reported being full-time, while one student reported being part-time. Only one participant reported being a first-generation student.

Figure 6 shows the composite Q-sort for this group. This group rated Statement 17 (Having a goal of a better life) the highest, followed by Statement 6 (Being able to overcome setbacks) and Statement 21 (Having family support). The lowest ranked statement for this group was Statement 13 (Faculty engaging with me outside of class), followed by Statement 26 (Participating in a summer bridge program) and Statement 30 (Participating in career counseling/services). This group had four distinguishing statements:

17. Having a goal of a better life.

1. A welcoming campus.

28. Participating in an internship/work-based learning.

13. Faculty engaging with me outside of class.

Statement 17 had the highest rank and Statement 13 had the lowest rank in the group.

Based on the distinguishing statements, and a review of the highs and lows and the narratives from the participants who factored into the group, the group was labeled—Success Factor: Focus Driven. This group is focused on the prize. Whether it is a goal of a better life or to get a better job, this group is focused on end results. From the post-sort survey, the participants stated it was important for them to see themselves as a provider for their family and that goals helped them determine priorities and stay focused on what is important. Being focus driven was a factor contributing to their success.

In addition, being focused driven may be also be connected to the participants level of grit. Grit is defined by focused passion and consistent interest (Perkins-Gough, 2013) and

related to a person's perseverance. This group is very focused on accomplishing their goals and their priorities.

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
13. Faculty engaging with me outside of class	30. Participating in career seling/services	16. Being a part-time student	29. Participating in an orientation program	11. Faculty caring about my success	14. Feeling I belong here	39. Participation in a support program for African	36. To get a better job	8. Being confident in my academic abilities	6. Being able to overcome setbacks	17. Having a goal of a better life
	26. Participating in a summer bridge program	25. Participating in a first-year experience program	31. Participating in college sports	24. Motivated to ask questions in class	4. Asking for assistance with classes	2. Advisors assisting with developing and navigating my degree plan	18. Having a mentor	5. Being a role model to my peers	21. Having family support	
		32. Participating in peer study group	15. Being a full-time student	9. Being supported by my community	27. Participating in a tutorial program	19. Having a strong high school education	23. Knowing where to go for help	34. To better financially support my family		
			28. Participating in an internship/work based learning	7. Being an active member of a ub/organization	22. Having the resources to pay for college	20. Having access to a computer/internet	35. To earn more money in my career			
				10. Being the first in my family to graduate from college	1. A welcoming campus	33. To be a more productive citizen	3. Advisors holding you accountable	40. Access to food, transportation, housing, etc.		
				37. To transfer to a university	12. Faculty that look like me	38. Learning study and test taking skills				

Legend

☐ Distinguishing statement at P< 0.05
☐ Distinguishing statement at P< 0.01
► z-Score for the statement is higher than in all other factors
◄ z-Score for the statement is lower than in all other factors
☐ Consensus statement

Figure 6. Composite Q-sort for Factor Group 1

Factor Group 2a: Breaking the Cycle

This factor group had two participants, which was 11% of the total number of participants. Both participants reported being first-generation college students. One participant reported earning 12–24 credits and the other reported earning 24–48 credits.

Figure 7 shows the composite Q-sort for this group. This group rated Statement 10 (Being the first in my family to graduate from college) as the highest, followed by Statement 34 (To better financially support my family) and Statement 9 (Being supported by my community). The lowest ranked statement for this group was Statement 19 (Having a strong high school education). This statement was followed by Statement 27 (Participating in a tutorial program) and Statement 39 (Participation in support program for African American males). This group had five distinguishing statements:

10. Being the first in my family to graduate from college.

9. Being supported by my community.

38. Learning study and test taking skills.

39. Participation in a support program for African American males.

27. Participating in a tutorial program.

Statement 10 had the highest rank and Statement 27 had the lowest rank in the group.

Based on the distinguishing statements, and a review of the highs and lows and the narratives from the participants who factored into the group, the group was labeled—Success Factor: Breaking the Cycle. This group is focused on changing the narrative for African American males. They want to change their current circumstances through education. This may have been more of a personal ambition as indicated by the highest-ranking statement of the group: Statement 10 (Being the first in my family to graduate from college). The participants

stated they came from communities where no one had an education and some around them did not appreciate them going to school. It is important for this group to persist in completing their academic goals because of the change it would bring to the image of African American males and their communities.

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
19. Having a strong high school education	39. Participation in a support program for African	38. Learning study and test taking skills	32. Participating in peer study group	7. Being an active member of a ub/organization	15. Being a full-time student	16. Being a part-time student	36. To get a better job	21. Having family support	34. To better financially support my family	10. Being the first in my family to graduate from college
	27. Participating in a tutorial program	33. To be a more productive citizen	29. Participating in an orientation program	13. Faculty engaging with me outside of class	8. Being confident in my academic abilities	18. Having a mentor	37. To transfer to a university	22. Having the resources to pay for college	9. Being supported by my community	
		1. A welcoming campus	31. Participating in college sports	4. Asking for assistance with classes	28. Participating in an internship/work based learning	3. Advisors holding you accountable	40. Access to food, transportation, housing, etc.	35. To earn more money in my career		
			26. Participating in a summer bridge program	20. Having access to a computer /internet	25. Participating in a first-year experience program	24. Motivated to ask questions in class	23. Knowing where to go for help			
			30. Participating in career seling/services	12. Faculty that look like me	11. Faculty caring about my success	17. Having a goal of a better life	14. Feeling I belong here			
				5. Being a role model to my peers	2. Advisors assisting with developing and navigating my degree plan	6. Being able to overcome setbacks				

Legend

☐ Distinguishing statement at P< 0.05

☐ Distinguishing statement at P< 0.01

► z-Score for the statement is higher than in all other factors

◄ z-Score for the statement is lower than in all other factors

☐ Consensus statement

Figure 7. Composite Q-sort for Factor Group 2a

Factor Group 2b: Making a Difference

This factor had one participant making up 5% of the total number of participants. This participant was a first-generation college student who earned 24–48 hours and was a full-time student.

Figure 8 shows the composite Q-sort for this group. The group rated Statement 2 (Advisors assisting with developing and navigating my degree plan), followed by Statement 34 (To better financially support my family) and Statement 5 (Being a role model to my peers) as the highest statements. The lowest ranked statement for this group was Statement 6 (Being able to overcome setbacks). This statement was followed by Statement 40 (Access to food, transportation, housing, etc.) and Statement 33 (To be a more productive citizen). This group had two distinguishing statements:

40. Access to food, transportation, housing, etc.

6. Being able to overcome setbacks

Statement 40 had the highest rank and Statement 6 had the lowest rank in the group.

Based on the distinguishing statements, and a review of the highs and lows and the narratives from the participants who factored into the group, the group was labeled—Success Factor: Making a Difference. This group may be motivated to succeed because the end result will influence those they are close to such as their immediate family or friends. For example, those family members may be motivated to enroll in college because they see the success of this group. In addition, this group wants to impact their family financially. The participant who factored into this group identified as a first-generation college student. This may have some impact on the way this participant conducted the sort because this individual will be the first to graduate from college in his immediate family.

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
6. Being able to overcome setbacks	40. Access to food, transportation, housing, etc.	10. Being the first in my family to graduate from college	3. Advisors holding you accountable	9. Being supported by my community	14. Feeling I belong here	23. Knowing where to go for help	11. Faculty caring about my success	17. Having a goal of a better life	34. To better financially support my family	2. Advisors assisting with developing and navigating my degree plan
		33. To be a more productive citizen	31. Participating in college sports	36. To get a better job	24. Motivated to ask questions in class	15. Being a full-time student	18. Having a mentor	27. Participating in a tutorial program	19. Having a strong high school education	5. Being a role model to my peers
			8. Being confident in my academic abilities	37. To transfer to a university	4. Asking for assistance with classes	29. Participating in an orientation program	12. Faculty that look like me	1. A welcoming campus	20. Having access to a computer /internet	
				22. Having the resources to pay for college	35. To earn more money in my career	26. Participating in a summer bridge program	28. Participating in an internship/work based learning	39. Participation in a support program for African		
				7. Being an active member of a ub/organization	30. Participating in career seling/services	21. Having family support	38. Learning study and test taking skills	32. Participating in peer study group		
					16. Being a part-time student	13. Faculty engaging with me outside of class	25. Participating in a first-year experience program			

Legend

☐ Distinguishing statement at P< 0.05

☐ Distinguishing statement at P< 0.01

► z-Score for the statement is higher than in all other factors

◄ z-Score for the statement is lower than in all other factors

☐ Consensus statement

Figure 8. Composite Q-sort for Factor Group 2b

Factor Group 3: Access to What I Need

This factor group had a total of two participants, which made up 11% of the total number of participants. One participant reported earning 12–24 credits and one reported earning 24–48 credits. Both participants reported being full-time and that they were not working.

Figure 9 shows the composite Q-sort for the factor group. This group rated Statement 40 (Access to food, transportation, housing, etc.) the highest, followed by Statement 37 (To transfer to a university) and Statement 28 (Participating in an internship/work-based learning). The lowest ranked statement for this group was Statement 1 (A welcoming campus). This statement was followed by Statement 36 (To get a better job) and Statement 5 (Being a role model to my peers). This group has two distinguishing statements:

40. Access to food, transportation, housing, etc.

31. Participating in college sports.

Statement 40 had the highest rank and Statement 31 had the lowest rank in the group.

Based on the distinguishing statements, and a review of the highs and lows and the narratives from the participants who factored into the group, the group was labeled—Success Factor: Access to What I Need. This group is focused on having the resources needed to be successful. Being able to gain access to transportation or housing for those who were student athletes were comments this group's participants used to describe their placements of statements and what statements should have been added to the Q-set. This group wants to know they have access to resources that would address the nonacademic needs that may arise while they persist to achieving their academic goals.

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
1. A welcoming campus	5. Being a role model to my peers	30. Participating in career seling/services	27. Participating in a tutorial program	12. Faculty that look like me	6. Being able to overcome setbacks	38. Learning study and test taking skills	34. To better financially support my family	39. Participation in a support program for African	37. To transfer to a university	40. Access to food, transportation, housing, etc.
	36. To get a better job	7. Being an active member of a ub/organization	35. To earn more money in my career	26. Participating in a summer bridge program	20. Having access to a computer /internet	2. Advisors assisting with developing and navigating my degree plan	24. Motivated to ask questions in class	23. Knowing where to go for help	28. Participating in an internship/work based learning	
		15. Being a full-time student	29. Participating in an orientation program	25. Participating in a first-year experience program	17. Having a goal of a better life	19. Having a strong high school education	22. Having the resources to pay for college	11. Faculty caring about my success		
			16. Being a part-time student	4. Asking for assistance with classes	32. Participating in peer study group	9. Being supported by my community	21. Having family support			
			8. Being confident in my academic abilities	10. Being the first in my family to graduate from college	33. To be a more productive citizen	3. Advisors holding you accountable	31. Participating in college sports			
				18. Having a mentor	13. Faculty engaging with me outside of class	14. Feeling I belong here				

Legend

☐ Distinguishing statement at P< 0.05

☐ Distinguishing statement at P< 0.01

► z-Score for the statement is higher than in all other factors

◄ z-Score for the statement is lower than in all other factors

☐ Consensus statement

Figure 9. Composite Q-sort for Factor 3.

Factor Group 4: Knowing My College Supports Me

This factor had five participants, which was 26% of the total number of participants. Only one participant reported being a first-generation college student. Two participants reported earning 12–24 credits, one reported earning 24–48 and two reported earning 48 credits or more. Two of the participants reported being full-time students and the other three reported being enrolled part-time.

Figure 10 shows the composite Q-sort for the group. This group rated Statement 2 (Advisors assisting with developing and navigating my degree plan) as the highest, followed by Statement 11 (Faculty caring about my success) and Statement 18 (Having a mentor). The lowest ranked statement for this group was Statement 31(Participating in college sports). This statement was followed by Statement 5 (Being a role model to my peers) and Statement 10 (Being the first in my family to graduate from college). This group had four distinguishing statements:

4. Asking for assistance with classes.

34. To better financially support my family.

40. Access to food, transportation, housing, etc.

31. Participating in college sports.

Statement 4 had the highest rank and Statement 31 had the lowest rank in the group.

Based on the distinguishing statements, and a review of the highs and lows and the narratives from the participants who factored into the group, the group was labeled—Success Factor: Knowing My College Supports Me. This group is focused on the college intentionally supporting them in being successful. Participants in this group reported having supports that were important to their success, such as a mentor/counselor available to help them and advisors

that looked like them and also held them accountable. Another participant stated that it was his

math teacher that had the greatest impact on how he sorted the cards. It was very important to

this group that the college have intentional supports concerning their persistence to achieving
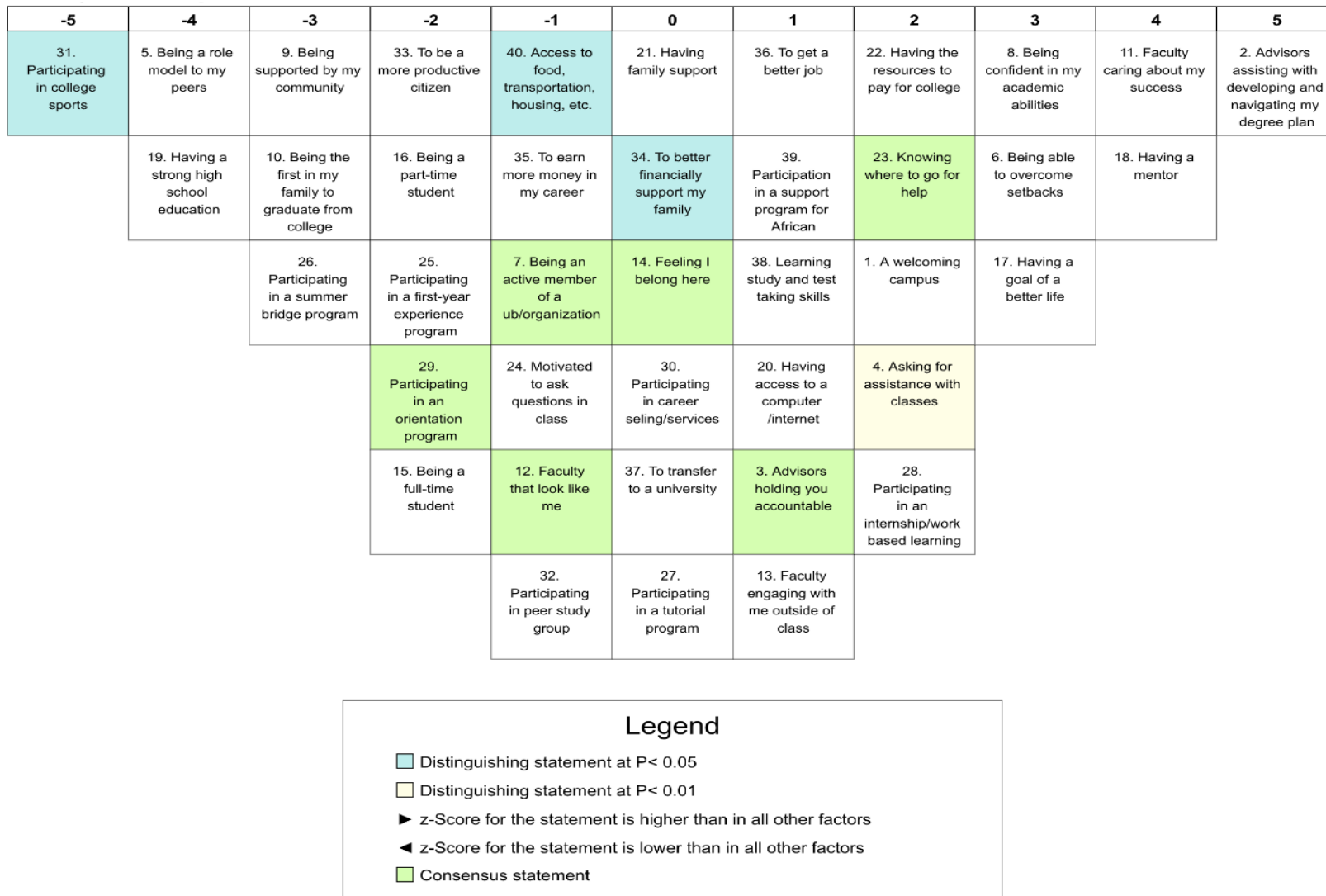
their academic goals.

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
31. Participating in college sports	5. Being a role model to my peers	9. Being supported by my community	33. To be a more productive citizen	40. Access to food, transportation, housing, etc.	21. Having family support	36. To get a better job	22. Having the resources to pay for college	8. Being confident in my academic abilities	11. Faculty caring about my success	2. Advisors assisting with developing and navigating my degree plan
	19. Having a strong high school education	10. Being the first in my family to graduate from college	16. Being a part-time student	35. To earn more money in my career	34. To better financially support my family	39. Participation in a support program for African	23. Knowing where to go for help	6. Being able to overcome setbacks	18. Having a mentor	
		26. Participating in a summer bridge program	25. Participating in a first-year experience program	7. Being an active member of a ub/organization	14. Feeling I belong here	38. Learning study and test taking skills	1. A welcoming campus	17. Having a goal of a better life		
			29. Participating in an orientation program	24. Motivated to ask questions in class	30. Participating in career seling/services	20. Having access to a computer /internet	4. Asking for assistance with classes			
			15. Being a full-time student	12. Faculty that look like me	37. To transfer to a university	3. Advisors holding you accountable	28. Participating in an internship/work based learning			
				32. Participating in peer study group	27. Participating in a tutorial program	13. Faculty engaging with me outside of class				

Legend

☐ Distinguishing statement at P< 0.05
☐ Distinguishing statement at P< 0.01
► z-Score for the statement is higher than in all other factors
◄ z-Score for the statement is lower than in all other factors
☐ Consensus statement

Figure 10. Composite Q-sort for Factor 4.

Chapter Summary

Data was collected from 19 African American male students who attended a rural community college in North Carolina. A manual Q-sort was administered to the participants and upon completion of the Q-sort, the participants completed a post-sort survey. The actual Q-sort provided the quantitative data and the post-survey provided qualitative data. The results of the Q-sort generated five factor groups with Factor Group 2 being a bipolar factor split with one factor (participant eight) being a negative factor in Factor Group 2 originally. The group was split using the process of a bipolar factor split and two groups, 2a and 2b, were created.

Factor 1: Focus Driven. This group was focused on the prize, the goal or dream. Their strongest factor concerning persisting at a rural community college was the accomplishment of whatever goal they have set for themselves.

Factor 2a: Breaking the Cycle. This group was focused on becoming more than others they may have a relationship with, such as family members or friends. This could be accomplished by changing their current circumstances through education. The group's strongest factor contributing to their persistence was not being like those that may have come before them, but becoming someone different.

Factor 2b: Making a Difference. This group was focused on being able to make an impact on their family and their community. This group's strongest factor contributing to their persistence was completing their academic goals, as they thought by showing others they can be successful, they can make an impact on those close to them.

Factor 3: Access to What I Need. This group wants to be able to have access to the non-academic supports to be successful in persisting toward their academic goals. This group wants to know there are resources available to assist with overcoming the challenges that may occur

outside of the classroom, which may include challenges related to a lack of transportation or food.

Factor 4: Knowing the College Supports Me. This group was focused on having a support structure at the college. This group wants to make sure that college is vested in their success just like they are by providing the necessary support for them to be successful in accomplishing their academic goals.

This chapter covered the data analysis and results of a Q-sort completed by 19 African American males who were currently enrolled students in a North Carolina rural community college at the time of the study. The Q-sort addressed the factors that contributed to students' persistence toward their academic goals.   The results of the study revealed five factor groups. Chapter 5 will cover the implications for practice based on the results from the study, as well as suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions and viewpoints of African American males who were enrolled in a rural community college concerning their persistence toward their academic degree/credential completion. All 19 participants were African American students who were currently enrolled in a rural community college in North Carolina at the time of the study. This study sought to answer the following research question: What are the viewpoints of African American males about the factors that contributed to their persistence toward completing their academic goals at a rural community college? A review of literature revealed that many studies are from the researcher's perspective concerning factors that affect this population, both positively and negatively. This study took a different approach by gaining the population's perception of factors that contributed to their success; therefore, this study fills a gap in the existing research.

To answer the study's research question, 19 African American male students enrolled at a rural community college were asked to complete a Q-sort and respond to a post-sort questionnaire that allowed participants to provide narrative responses. From the literature, conversations with professional in the field, and my own personal knowledge, a Q-set of 40 statements was development to be used in the Q-sort.

The participants were asked to sort the Q-set statements based on their perceptions of factors that contributed to their persistence in achieving their academic goals while enrolled at a rural community college. The post-sort questionnaire asked each participant to provide information about why they ranked a statement as "mostly agreed" or mostly disagreed."

Chapter 3 provided an overview of the methodology that was used to conduct the study. This included the research design, process for data collection, data analysis and the interpretation

of the data. Chapter 4 provided an in-depth analysis of the data to include data correlation, factor

scores, factor arrays, and consensus and distinguishing statements.   In addition, Chapter 4

discussed the different factor groups. There were five factors that were grouped by the sorts: 1)

Factor Group 1: Focus Driven; 2) Factor Group 2a: Breaking the Cycle; 3) Factor Group 2b:

Making a Difference; 4) Factor Group 3: Access to What I Need; and 5) Factor Group 4:

Knowing My College Supports Me.

In this final chapter, the implications for practice will be discussed based on the

perceptions of the participants. In addition, this chapter will discuss recommendations for future

research and provide an overall summary of the chapter.

Implications

The results from this study may have implications on supporting and teaching this

population. In addition, the results from this study can be used to increase access and success

strategies for the African American male population who chooses to enroll in a community

college.

Implication for practice #1: Marketing to this population. With low tuition costs and

small classes, African American males benefit from enrolling in a community college

environment (Mason, 1998). Based on the results of this study, information from the factor

groups can be used to market to this population. For example, Factor Group 2a was focused on

breaking the cycle. This group is focused on not being like those that may have come before

them. Colleges can choose to market to this population by letting them know if they attend this

college, the college will help them in changing their lives.

Another thought to consider would be what the college offers to assist this population.

Factor Group 4 was focused on knowing their college supported them. When designing support

programs for African American males at a community college, administrators need to consider

what support programs African American males perceive to assist them in achieving their

academic goals. Factor Group 4's highest statements were "advisors assisting with developing

and navigating my degree plan" and "having a mentor". Community college administrators may

want to consider emphasizing those support programs in their marketing to this population.

       Implication for practice #2: Supporting this population. African American males

would benefit from enrolling in a community college. Bush and Bush (2010) stated that minority

males enroll in community colleges because they feel these institutions will provide them the

opportunity for upward social and economic mobility; however, less than a third of African

American men earn a degree or credential in six years at a community college (Wood & Harris,

2017). Based on the results of this study, knowing that the college provided intentional support

to students was a common feeling among participants in Factor Group 4. The participants who

factored into that group had comments referencing effective college supports, such as the

provision of a mentor/counselor available to help them and having advisors that looked like them

holding them accountable. When community colleges are designing programs that support this

population, one factor they may want to consider is how they will intentionally support African

American males in persisting toward completing their academic goals. Intentional support will

add a level of accountability for institutions. Institutions will have to be purposeful in working

with this population and making sure that this population is utilizing these supports.

       Environmental factors have been shown to affect the persistence of African American

males at community colleges. Some of these environmental factors include college finances and

hopelessness/helplessness (Mason, 1998). Factor Group 3 focused on "having access to food,

transportation, housing, etc." as their highest statement. These nonacademic supports may be

beneficial to African American males who attend a community college and assist with addressing those environmental factors.

   Implication for practice #3: Faculty professional development. Faculty interaction can be a key factor in the success of African American males at a community college. In fact, faculty relationships have an impact on the persistence of African American males enrolled in a community college (Bauer, 2014; Harris et al., 2015; Harrison & Palacios, 2014; Ingram et al., 2016; Wood, 2014; Wood & Turner, 2011). Professional development for faculty concerning how to interact and support this population is important. Based on the results of this study, the five groups provided information that would benefit faculty in working with this population. For example, Factor Group 1 was very focused on accomplishing a goal. The participants stated that goals helped them determine their priorities and stay focused on what is important. This can be beneficial for faculty in determining strategies to motivate African American males in the classroom. In addition, Factor Group 4 was focused on knowing the college intentionally supported them. This would include faculty. This group ranked the statement, "faculty caring about my success," as a high factor that contributed to their persistence toward achieving their academic goals. Finally, Factor Group 2a's highest statement was "being the first in my family to graduate from college". This group was focused on breaking the cycle. The strongest factor contributing to their success was not being like those who may be in their life. This may be very beneficial for faculty to know to understand what may motivate this population to be successful.

Implication for practice #4: Self-exploration. This study sought to understand the perception of African American males concerning factors that contribute to their success in persisting towards their academic goals. This information can be beneficial for incoming students to explore when enrolling into the college. Participants can complete the Q-sort as a part of the orientation program and the college success course. This would allow the participant to think about what factors assist them in being successful in completing their academic goals. Support staff and faculty can counsel students concerning their results and gain insight into thoughts about what makes them successful.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on African American male perceptions of factors that contributed to their success in persisting toward completing their academic goals. In reviewing the results of the study and knowing the delimitations of study, three recommendations can be made for future research.

Recommendation #1: Replicate at an urban community college. The study was conducted with African American males who attended a rural community college. Their points of view may be different from those who attend an urban community college. With a community college that may have more resources to offer than a rural community college, this may influence the viewpoints of the African American males completing the study.

Recommendation #2: Focus groups with the participants. The post-survey questionnaire provided a limited amount of qualitative data for the researcher to consider. Conducting this study and creating focus groups based on the factors would have provided more insight concerning the participants' thoughts when sorting the statements. This would allow the researcher to gain more insight into the viewpoints of the participants.

Recommendation #3: Q-methodology concerning the barriers. This study focused on the factors that contributed to the success of African American males enrolled at a rural community college. A Q-methodology study of the factors that create a barrier to their success should be explored. Upon completion of both Q-sorts, the researcher can compare the data and see if any themes emerge.

Based on the factors that were identified in the study, there were five areas that African American males perceived to be strong contributors to their success as a community college student. Those areas were 1) Focus Driven, 2) Breaking the Cycle, 3) Making a Difference, 4) Access to What I Need, and 4) Knowing My College Supports Me. Figure 11 provides a visual representation of the factors identified. Individually and collectively, these identified factors may assist community college faculty and staff in supporting this population effectively.
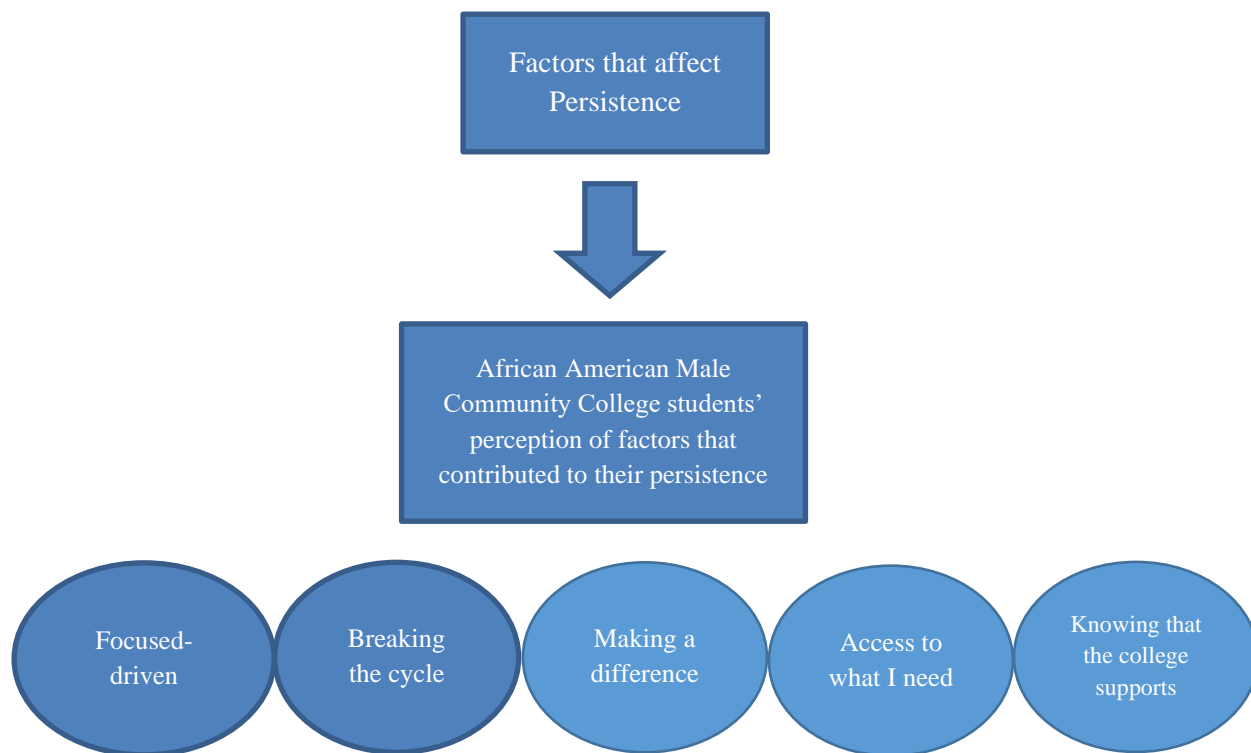
Factors that affect
Persistence

↓

African American Male
Community College students'
perception of factors that
contributed to their persistence

| Focused-driven | Breaking the cycle | Making a difference | Access to what I need | Knowing that the college supports |

Figure 11. Factors that contribute to the success of African American males enrolled at a community college.

Chapter Summary

Community colleges across the nation are looking to support all students including the African American male population. Understanding African American male perceptions concerning factors that contribute to their success is critical to the institution supporting them in completing their academic goals.

This Q-methodology study was conducted to understand the perceptions and viewpoints concerning factors that contributed to the success of African American males who were enrolled in a rural community college. A total of 19 African American males participated in the study. Those participants were asked to sort a Q-set of 40 statements concerning factors that contributed

to their success at a rural community college. Upon completion of the Q-sort, participants were asked to complete a post-sort questionnaire that collected demographic data and provided insight into their individual sorts.

A data analysis was conducted utilizing Ken-Q software and five factor groups of viewpoints that contributed to the success of African American males in persisting toward completing their academic goals were identified.   Those factor groups were named: 1) Focus Driven, 2) Breaking the Cycle, 3) Making a Difference, 4) Access to What I Need, and 5) Knowing My College Supports Me.

This chapter included an overview of the research method, a discussion of the implications for practice, and recommendations for future studies.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Q-Set Statements

1. A welcoming campus
2. Advisors assisting with developing and navigating my degree plan
3. Advisors holding you accountable
4. Asking for assistance with classes
5. Being a role model to my peers
6. Being able to overcome setbacks
7. Being an active member of a club/organization
8. Being confident in my academic abilities
9. Being supported by my community
10. Being the first in my family to graduate from college
11. Faculty caring about my success
12. Faculty that look like me
13. Faculty engaging with me outside of class
14. Feeling I belong here
15. Being a full-time student
16. Being a part-time student
17. Having a goal of a better life
18. Having a mentor
19. Having a strong high school education
20. Having access to a computer /internet
21. Having family support
22. Having the resources to pay for college
23. Knowing where to go for help
24. Motivated to ask questions in class
25. Participating in a first-year experience program
26. Participating in a summer bridge program
27. Participating in a tutorial program
28. Participating in an internship/work-based learning
29. Participating in an orientation program
30. Participating in career counseling/services
31. Participating in college sports
32. Participating in peer study group
33. To be a more productive citizen
34. To better financially support my family
35. To earn more money in my career
36. To get a better job
37. To transfer to a university
38. Learning study and test taking skills
39. Participation in a support program for African American males
40. Access to food, transportation, housing, etc.

Appendix B: Post-Survey Questionnaire

KEEP YOUR CARDS DISPLAYED
➢ Now, write the card numbers in the diagram on the page provided.

➢ After you fill in the diagram, answer the remaining questions.

When all the questions have been answered, please return completed forms to the **researcher**.

Post Q Sort Questionnaire:

Card # _____
1) Why did place your "very strongly agree" card under **+5?**

Card # _____
2) Why did you place your "very strongly disagree" card under **-5?**

3) Were there specific statements that you had difficulty placing? *Choose one and please list the number of the statement and describe the difficulty.*
Card # _____

4) What has had the greatest impact on how you sorted your cards the way you did?

5) Is there a statement that you would have like to see in the sort? If so, what would the card have said and where would you have placed it?

Q Sort Instructions continued:

Additional questions for study:

Do you feel there are any components that were missing?

Do you have any additional comments?

What is your age? _____

Are you a first-generation college student?

    A. Yes
    B. No

How many credits have you earned?

    A. 12- 24 credits
    B. 24 – 48 credits
    C. 48 + credits

What is your current enrollment status?

    A. Part-Time
    B. Full-Time

You attend classes during the? (circle all that applies)

    A. Day
    B. Evening
    C. On Line

If employed, how many hours do you work during the current semester? _____

Appendix C: Factor Scores with Corresponding Ranks

Factor Scores with Corresponding Ranks

Statement	Statement	Statement	factor 1 Z-score	factor 1 Rank	factor 2a Z-score	factor 2a Rank	factor 2b Z-score	factor 2b Rank	factor 3 Z-score	factor 3 Rank	factor 4 Z-score	factor 4 Rank
1	1. A welcoming campus	1	-0.53	28	-1.43	37	0.84	11	-2.31	40	0.99	9
2	2. Advisors assisting with developing and navigating my degree plan	2	0.39	14	-0.04	23	2.11	1	0.32	13	1.99	1
3	3. Advisors holding you accountable	3	0.33	16	0.48	14	-0.84	34	0.23	15	0.28	16
4	4. Asking for assistance with classes	4	0.04	19	-0.57	26	-0.42	27	-0.39	27	0.89	10
5	5. Being a role model to my peers	5	1.28	5	-0.72	29	1.68	2	-1.6	38	-1.38	38
6	6. Being able to overcome setbacks	6	1.69	2	0.24	17	-2.11	40	0.13	19	1.17	5
7	7. Being an active member of a club/organization	7	-0.51	27	-0.2	24	-0.84	30	-1.07	36	-0.31	26
8	8. Being confident in my academic abilities	8	1.37	4	0.2	20	-1.26	36	-0.98	34	1.19	4
9	9. Being supported by my community	9	-0.49	26	1.43	3	-0.42	26	0.23	16	-1.16	35
10	10. Being the first in my family to graduate from college	10	-1	34	1.86	1	-1.26	37	-0.49	28	-1.18	36
11	11. Faculty caring about my success	11	-0.27	24	0.04	22	0.84	7	1.24	6	1.47	2
12	12. Faculty that look like me	12	-0.25	23	-0.63	28	0.42	13	-0.36	25	-0.36	28
13	13. Faculty engaging with me outside of class	13	-2.02	40	-0.24	25	0	19	-0.26	23	0.27	17
14	14. Feeling I belong here	14	0.11	18	0.61	10	0	20	0.23	14	0.04	20
15	15. Being a full-time student	15	-0.92	32	0.24	18	0	21	-1.3	37	-1.11	33
16	16. Being a part-time student	16	-1.08	35	0.57	12	-0.42	25	-0.85	33	-0.64	31
17	17. Having a goal of a better life	17	2.58	1	0.28	15	1.26	6	0.1	20	1.12	6
18	18. Having a mentor	18	0.98	8	0.53	13	0.42	12	-0.58	30	1.37	3
19	19. Having a strong high school education	19	0.39	13	-2.1	40	1.26	5	0.23	17	-1.98	39
20	20. Having access to a computer /internet	20	0.38	15	-0.61	27	1.26	4	0.13	18	0.42	15
21	21. Having family support	21	1.6	3	1.38	4	0	23	0.98	8	0.21	18
22	22. Having the resources to pay for college	22	-0.05	21	1.34	5	-0.84	32	0.98	9	1.05	8
23	23. Knowing where to go for help	23	0.93	9	0.61	11	0.42	17	1.34	5	1.05	7
24	24. Motivated to ask questions in class	24	-0.34	25	0.28	16	-0.42	24	0.98	10	-0.36	27
25	25. Participating in a first-year experience program	25	-1.22	36	0.2	19	0.42	16	-0.36	24	-0.86	32
26	26. Participating in a summer bridge program	26	-1.44	39	-0.81	33	0	22	-0.36	26	-1.29	37
27	27. Participating in a tutorial program	27	-0.03	20	-1.58	39	0.84	8	-0.58	29	-0.02	23
28	28. Participating in an internship/work based learning	28	-0.95	33	0.2	21	0.42	14	1.47	3	0.62	11
29	29. Participating in an orientation program	29	-0.8	30	-0.77	31	0	18	-0.75	32	-1.11	34
30	30. Participating in career counseling/services	30	-1.3	38	-1.05	34	-0.42	28	-0.98	35	0	21
31	31. Participating in college sports	31	-0.89	31	-0.77	32	-1.26	35	0.42	11	-2.51	40
32	32. Participating in peer study group	32	-1.28	37	-0.72	30	0.84	10	0	21	-0.6	29
33	33. To be a more productive citizen	33	-0.19	22	-1.38	36	-1.68	38	-0.23	22	-0.6	30
34	34. To better financially support my family	34	1.08	7	1.53	2	1.68	3	1.01	7	0.2	19
35	35. To earn more money in my career	35	0.7	10	1.29	7	-0.42	29	-0.68	31	-0.25	25
36	36. To get a better job	36	1.08	6	1.29	6	-0.84	33	-1.69	39	0.6	12
37	37. To transfer to a university	37	-0.58	29	1.25	8	-0.84	31	1.96	2	-0.01	22
38	38. Learning study and test taking skills	38	0.27	17	-1.34	35	0.42	15	0.39	12	0.47	14
39	39. Participation in a support program for African American males	39	0.42	12	-1.53	38	0.84	9	1.43	4	0.54	13
40	40. Access to food, transportation, housing, etc.	40	0.53	11	0.63	9	-1.68	39	2.05	1	-0.21	24