

UNDERSTANDING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK MEN THAT HAVE
GRADUATED FROM A TECHNICAL COLLEGE

by

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(Under the Direction of JAY W. ROJEWSKI)

ABSTRACT

Two-year post-secondary institutions such as community and technical colleges continue to serve as the primary pathway into higher education for men of color (Bush & Bush, 2010). 71% of Black and Latino men begin their experiences in public postsecondary education at a community or technical college (Wood, Harris, & White 2015). The belief is that these institutions will foster upward social and economic mobility and are uniquely positioned to help create new life opportunities for Black men, their families, and their communities.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to highlight the lived experiences of Black men who have graduated from a technical college. Improvements in degree completion rates for Black men has positive implications including a better quality of life for this population along with the potential for greater contributions to the socio-economic prosperity in our communities.

Eight self-identified Black men who have graduated from a technical college participated in this study. The development of the interview protocols were guided by Patton's (2002) and Kruger's (1997) question types that reflect on experience and behavior. By using guiding questions, I was able to explore the lived experiences of Black men and understand the factors that influenced their success. The guiding questions were: (1) Why do Black men decide to

attend a two-year technical college? (2) How would they describe their overall college experience? (3) What forces or factors do Black men who have graduated from a technical college credit for their success? (a) What internal or familial forces were most beneficial to their college experience? (b) What institutional or external forces were most beneficial to their college experience? These questions helped to analyze the participants' experiences that were under study. Their perspective has the potential to give us a broader, more holistic view which may fuel opportunities for further research on student success within technical education. Finally, institutional characteristics such as having engaged instructors, small class sizes, a diverse student body, and a welcoming campus environment all emerged from this study as findings geared towards maximizing the academic potential for Black men who enroll in technical colleges.

INDEX WORDS: Black males, Technical College, Academic Success,
Higher education, Lived Experiences

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the Black men who have overcome challenges, obstacles, and have ultimately persevered in their pursuit of higher education. This study is small snapshot of the experiences of Black men and how they create the capacity for success. This study is also dedicated to future students who can hopefully use this as motivation to achieve their goal of earning a college degree. Finally, this study is dedicated to the many individuals who are working tirelessly to destroy the negative stigma that often surrounds technical education. Our students are changing the world!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose Statement.....	4
Research Questions.....	5
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Importance of Study.....	9
Summary	10
2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE	12
History and Evolution of the Two-year Postsecondary Model.....	12
History of The Technical College System of Georgia.....	16
Black Men and Two-year Colleges.....	16
Theoretical Framework.....	18
Theories Relevant to Collegiate Black Men	28
Institutional Factors that Impact the Lived Experiences of Black Men.....	36

External Factors that Impact the Lived Experiences of Black Men	41
Relevant Research Studies	42
Summary.....	45
3 RESEARCH METHOD.....	47
Research Purpose	47
Research Questions.....	47
Research Design.....	48
Participants and Sampling.....	51
Data Collection	53
Data Saturation.....	58
Data Analysis	60
Trustworthiness.....	65
Confidentiality	65
Member Checking.....	66
Reflexive Journal	67
Role of the Researcher & Subjectivity Statement.....	68
Limitations	70
Summary.....	71
4 PARTICIPANT PROFILES.....	72
Trey.....	73
Michael	77
Bill.....	79
Derrick	83

Craig.....	86
Larry.....	88
Fitzgerald	90
5 RESULTS	94
Researcher Reflections.....	94
Results.....	99
Campus Climate.....	100
Mentorship	104
Student Support Services	108
Campus Involvement	110
External Factors	114
Conclusion	116
6 FINDINGS.....	117
Summary of Findings.....	117
Practice Recommendations.....	120
Future Research Recommendations.....	123
Conclusions.....	124
REFERENCES	126
APPENDICES	
A STUDY INTRODUCTORY LETTER.....	148
B PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM.....	149
C INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	152
D INVITATIONAL FLYER	153

E INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	154
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LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Interview Question Outline.....	55
Table 2: Demographic Profiles	73
Table 3: Themes/Categories of Significance.....	100

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Mason’s Model of Community College Persistence.....	19
Figure 2: Socio-ecological Outcomes Model	22

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On the evening of April 21, 2011, an abundance of nervous energy flowed through my body as I stood on a stage of the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Atlanta during the Georgia Occupational Award of Leadership banquet hosted by the Technical College System of Georgia. I remember these words as if it was only yesterday. "And the 2011, Georgia Technical College Student of the Year is (drumroll) Alvie Coes, III". I never thought that I would hear those words as a college student pursuing a degree in funeral service education. The journey to earning a postsecondary degree was intimidating. Working a full-time job, several years removed from an academic setting, and learning to navigate the college process were all parts of my lived experience. Although successful, I encountered challenges. However, there were also resources, both internal to the institution and external throughout the community, which contributed significantly to my success. Reflecting on my journey has encouraged me to learn more about other Black men and their experiences while attending a technical college.

This study was designed to understand the lived experiences of Black men who have graduated from technical colleges. A technical college offers various credentials such as a certificate, diploma, or an associate's degree in various technical subjects often as part of the qualifications and training required for a particular job (Collins, 2020). Technical colleges are an important instrument of access to higher education and economic development for Black men looking to acquire skills necessary for employment in the 21st century and serve as a primary pathway into higher education for Black men (Bush & Bush, 2010). In fact, 71% of Black and

Latino men first enter postsecondary education at a community or technical college (Wood et al., 2015). It is believed that these institutions foster upward social and economic mobility that allows Black men to prepare and successfully compete for careers. These institutions create life opportunities for men of color, their families, and their communities. Given the fact that 71% of Black and Latino men first enter postsecondary education at a community or technical college, these colleges must remain committed to open access education and their local community's needs (Wood et al., 2015).

Discussions regarding the dilemma of Black men are abundant on community and technical college campuses throughout the United States. Student affairs professionals, faculty members, and administrators are deeply alarmed about Black male student enrollment, persistence, achievement, and graduation (Esters & Mosby, 2007). Additionally, enrollment numbers illustrate an unbalanced representation of Black male students in relation to their female counterparts. This imbalance is quite common across various campuses. Though there should be concern about the need to enroll more black men in postsecondary education, even more alarming is how black male students perform once they are enrolled. Nationally, the US Department of Education indicates that 11.5 percent of black men will drop out in their first year of college. By year two, 48.9 percent will leave their two-year postsecondary institution without a certificate, diploma, or degree (Esters & Mosby, 2007). Black men have the highest dropout rate among every racial/ethnic and gender subgroup.

Nevertheless, these concerns have provided the motivation for this study. My research seeks to focus extensively on the black male experience focusing on their academic achievement, persistence, and overall lived experiences while attending a technical college. Based upon my experiences as technical college graduate and now as an administrator, I can attest to the great

challenges that are faced by those who truly desire to enhance the success of Black male students. Some of these challenges include previous academic preparation, the difficulty of balancing the demands of school, work, and family, and finally their level of commitment to academic goals. In addition, outside forces, such as media portrayals, racial/gender stereotypes, and peer influences, can create obstacles for students and their instructors. However, external roadblocks, those factors that occur prior to students' experience in the technical college or in their outside lives, are only one piece of the success puzzle. In fact, conversations around black men in public two-year institutions often focus on these factors, while negating the internal (institutional) roadblocks that detract from student success. Among internal roadblocks (e.g., institutional policies, support resources, programming, personnel), particular attention should be directed to the quality of interactions between faculty and black male students.

Attempting to understand Black men who attend technical and community college is critical given that they represent a disproportionate population served by these institutions. Notwithstanding, they are more likely than their White or Asian American counterparts to prematurely depart from these institutions. Specifically, data indicates that Black men have the lowest persistence and attainment rates among their male peers. For example, of Black men who enter two-year postsecondary education, only 42.2 % will have persisted or attained a degree within 3 years (Esters & Mosby, 2007). In contrast, 53.2 % of Latino males, 55.6 % of White males, and 76.7 % of Asian American males will persist or attain a degree within the same time frame (BPS 2003/2009).

Furthermore, a common misconception about Black male students is that they are uneducated and have low expectations for their future (McMilliam, 2003). Studies conducted on this topic have concentrated exclusively on the obstacles that are faced by Black students (Wood

& Newman, 2017). There is an acknowledgment that obstacles should be considered; however, there is growing support for additional research on those who have overcome the obstacles and persisted to graduation (Freeman, 1997). By studying and sharing these students' lived experiences, we will learn, through their own words, the elements of their journey, including experiences and challenges that led them to earn a college degree.

For example, Bush and Bush (2010) provided a thorough explanation about factors that facilitate college success for Black men. Their study highlighted the importance of bridge and orientation programs that give Black men the opportunity to get acclimated to college life prior to enrolling as students. They also highlighted the need for programs and initiatives such as faculty mentor programs, small learning communities, and positive student-faculty relationships. These programs focus on delivering a wide range of support systems that help facilitate success for Black men.

Additionally, various external factors also impact success for Black men. For example, scholars suggest that families play a key role when it comes to establishing a positive identity for Black male students and serve as a solid foundation for students to develop confidence and a sense of belonging within the academy. Watson (2006) emphasized that positive self-images for Black male students are generated from family role models and high expectations. It is important to note that the literature review presented in chapter two further examines the factors that impact success for these men.

Purpose Statement

A thorough investigation into the experiences, perceptions, and outcomes of Black men in postsecondary education should acknowledge the uniqueness and importance of the technical college experience. Researchers have meticulously addressed the educational realities of Black

men within postsecondary education. Most of this scholarship has focused on men who are enrolled in public 4-year colleges and universities (Harris & Wood, 2013; Wood & Palmer, 2014). As a result, the predominant theories, models, and assumptions regarding Black men were developed based on those enrolled in 4-year institutions. However, enrollment rates for Black men demonstrate that their primary pathway into postsecondary education is in the public two-year college system (Wood, 2013). For example, 63.2% of Black men are enrolled in public 2-year colleges while only 36.5% are enrolled in 4-year institutions (National Postsecondary Student Aid Study [NPSAS], 2012a).

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of Black men who have graduated from a two-year postsecondary technical college, highlighting their success. Creating the opportunity for Black men to share stories about their accomplishments has the capacity to strengthen their resolve and confidence (Wood, 2013). Also, understanding these experiences can help higher education decision-makers enact policies and processes that will support the success of Black men enrolled in technical college programs. Improvements in degree completion rates for Black men have positive implications for a better quality of life for this population and the potential for greater contributions to the socioeconomic prosperity in our communities.

Research Questions

1. Why do Black men decide to attend a two-year technical college?
2. How do Black men describe their overall college experience?
3. What forces or factors do Black men who have graduated from a technical college credit for their success?
 - (a) What internal or familial forces were most beneficial to college experience?
 - (b) What institutional or external forces were most beneficial to their college experience?

Conceptual Framework

This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews to understand and re-story the lived experiences of successful Black men who have graduated from a technical college. The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in antideficit thinking (Valencia, 2010). An antideficit perspective presents a forward-thinking sensibility by identifying factors such as pedagogical practices, societal and environmental factors, as well as institutional, curricular, and co-curricular policies as factors associated with student success (Gourd & Lightfoot, 2009).

In many studies, researchers often focus on negative aspects of the subject matter instead of examining the positive aspects of the subject, i.e., what does not or has not worked. Much of previous research has focused on why students were not successful instead of why they were successful (Allen, 1999; Glenn, 2004; Bush & Bush, 2005; Strayhorn, 2008).

In a national study, which used an antideficit framework, Harper (2010) revealed insights into Black male college students who had achieved success. In his research, Harper studied students in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields and asked how these students were able to “thrive and negotiate environments that are culturally foreign, unresponsive, politically complex, and overwhelmingly Caucasian” (p. 71). Harper’s (2010) antideficit framework is comprised of three distinct components that are used to explain what factors contribute to the college success of African American males. Harper stated there are three pipelines that make up the basis for the framework: pre-college socialization and readiness; college achievement; and post college success. Within those pipelines are eight dimensions of achievement: family; k-12 school forces; out of school college preparation resources; classroom experiences; out of class engagement; enriching educational experiences; graduate school enrollment; and career readiness.

The antideficit focused questions also sought to uncover how Black male students have managed to successfully navigate college and complete despite barriers such as racism and unpreparedness. Harper (2012) maintained that there is value in moving toward an antideficit perspective on student achievement by identifying perspectives of how Black men have achieved degree attainment and college success. Grounded within the antideficit framework this study will use two specific models to provide a thorough understanding for analyzing Black male technical college students' challenges, successes, and overall lived experiences.

Mason's Model of Community College Persistence

Mason (1998) proposed a model of community college persistence that is deemed essential for understanding this proposed study. Mason's model was developed specifically to understand the experiences of Black men at community colleges using background, academic, and environmental variables. The model uses a strengths-based perspective that highlights reasons students persist in their educational programs, rather than determining the reasons that students leave college (e.g., Tinto [1993], Bean and Metzner [1985]). Mason identified four variables that can positively impact retention:

1. Commitment to and internalization of educational goals.
2. Encouragement from family and friends.
3. Utility, i.e., a belief that education will positively affect the student's life.
4. The helplessness/hopelessness factor, which is the belief that no matter what a student does, it will not make a difference in his life; that his power to change or control certain elements is limited.

The Socioecological Outcomes Model

Harris and Wood (2012) articulated the Socioecological Outcomes (SEO) model to address the literature gap as it relates to the challenges and success for men of color in community colleges. This model focuses on various factors such as persistence, achievement, and attainment for men who have been historically underrepresented in education, particularly men of color. The SEO model guides this study and provides a model for understanding the lived experiences of Black men as they navigate the two-year postsecondary system. The key constructs and interactions presented in the model provide a foundation for facilitating success for Black men through quality instruction, program development, improving student services, and refining institutional policies.

Finally, many predominant frameworks can be used to examine the lives of Black men who have graduated from a two-year post-secondary institution. This study is guided by the assertion that when studying a specific ethnicity or gender, it cannot be assumed that a generic framework is appropriate. Whenever possible, it is preferable to use a model created for the targeted population. Taking both models into consideration ensures that the theoretical lens is extensive enough that relevant themes are not missed, yet precise enough to make certain that themes pertinent to this specific population are included. As a Black male and as a researcher, I understand that the Black male experience in higher education is unique. As such, the models and frameworks presented here attempt to account for the unique racial, gender, and cultural realities faced by this group. The frameworks also guides researchers in reframing their thinking, avoiding assumptions, and discovering new insights that share success stories for these men.

Importance of Study

There are various reasons that support the importance of this proposed study. Foremost, a continued stigma exists that technical colleges and other two-year postsecondary institutions provide a level of education that is substandard (Ravitch, 2014). This notion is erroneously based on a perception that technical colleges are inadequate and do not require the same level of commitment regarding academic rigor as four-year institutions. Given this stigma, it is important to highlight the lived experiences of students, in this case Black men, who have shared the technical college experience. A common belief exists that Black men are forced to attend technical colleges because they did not receive enough scholarship money or because they were unprepared to make the transition into adulthood (Crawford, 2011). Through exploring the lived experiences of Black men who have graduated from a technical college, this study seeks to challenge these misperceptions about the educational quality that students receive through technical education.

Secondly, the United States is progressively becoming a nation with an ethnic minority, majority population (Frey, 2018). The U.S. can only be competitive in a global knowledge economy if degree attainment rates improve drastically for ethnic minorities such as Black men (Harrison, 2014). Black men face several issues, such as socioeconomic barriers, that make them vulnerable to crime and educational failure (Serpell et al., 2009). McMilliam (2003) stated that Black men must see higher education as an opportunity for advancement and not a hindrance to professional development. This study aims to provide essential information and insight to policy makers, educators, and students. The research will discuss relevant literature that highlights the lived experiences of Black men that have graduated from a technical college. Additionally, we

hope to explore avenues for improved strategies that focus on ensuring success for Black men as they are navigating within the technical college system.

Unfortunately, most research on Black male college students focus on traditional-aged students ages 18-24, not adult or non-traditional age Black male college students. From an institutional standpoint, Warde (2008) concluded that Black men would benefit from research conducted on retention, social well-being, and other factors that would provide guidance and support at the institutional level. These practices and strategies could help improve outcomes for Black men, ultimately allowing opportunities for advancement. My study will address the gap in our current understanding of Black male students who have successfully graduated from a technical college. Findings will present firsthand perspectives and experiences, allowing participants to share their thoughts regarding their experiences and success. Many years of emphasis focusing on the struggles and plight of black men within higher education have conditioned people to assume that is all there is. We do in fact know a lot more about why Black men fail, however this study attempts to highlight how and why they succeed. As practitioners we can take this information and recalibrate our vision and thinking regarding the types of programs and initiatives that we support to create pathways of success for Black men.

Summary

This qualitative study examined the lived experiences that influence college success and degree attainment of Black men who have graduated from a two-year postsecondary technical college. According to Hull (1997), qualitative research provides an opportunity in the understanding of human experiences to reveal the process which people say about their worlds and report what those meanings are. Qualitative inquiries can be used to explore social or human problems to help build a holistic picture (Creswell, 1998). Findings from this study can support

dialogue about participants' perspectives that expand understanding and inform practice that supports success for Black men at the technical college level.

Chapter two provides the literature review with insights concerning theoretical models influencing student retention, engagement, and performance among Black men. Other elements explored in the literature review are the institutional and external factors that support college retention and graduation for Black men.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following section offers a review of literature highlighting the lived experiences of Black men who have graduated from a technical college by exploring factors that shape student success. This review of literature examines components of (a) the history and evolution of two-year postsecondary institutions, including technical colleges, (b) Black men and two-year colleges including theories related to their experience, and finally (d) factors that contribute to their success. The literature review provides a basis for the theoretical framework and the research questions used during the interviews for this study.

History and Evolution of the Two-year Postsecondary Model

Two-year postsecondary institutions are known by various names across the United States, such as junior colleges, community colleges, and technical colleges (Boggs, 2011). According to Boggs (2011), these schools have progressed from strictly providing courses leading to associate degrees or courses that transfer to another college into providing technical education and training for those who want access to immediate careers in the workforce, which has served as the primary mission of technical colleges throughout the United States. Ewell (2011), explained the mission of two-year postsecondary institutions in various ways. These institutions primarily focus on areas such as granting associate degrees in various fields, allowing transfer credit to four-year institutions, providing training for entry-level workforce certificates, contract training

for local business, continuing education that focus on literacy training, and offering developmental instruction to render students college ready.

The various nature of their missions reinforces the idea that technical colleges offer a different purpose for each community that they serve. These institutions tend to have lower tuition costs, open-access admissions standards, and flexible class offerings to meet the needs of the students and communities being served (Boggs, 2011). This alignment is critical in establishing the correct type of programs that are suitable for their specific population. Technical college enrollment is very fluid. Much of their budgeting, salaries, and planning are based heavily on projected enrollment. It is important to note that enrollment has outpaced projections. Two-year postsecondary institutions are comprised of roughly 11 million college students and approximately 46% of the undergraduate population (Jurgens, 2010).

The development of two-year postsecondary institutions should be placed in the context of the growth of all higher education in the twentieth century (Cohen & Braver, 2008). The two-year postsecondary education model is an extension of a comprehensive evolutionary process within the world of education. The community college has developed and expanded since its inception in the 1800s (Kintzer & Bryant, 1998). The Industrial Revolution also played a significant role as a precursor of the education movement in the U.S. The introduction of power-driven machinery and factory creation allowed rapid industrialization to take root, ultimately leading to overcrowded cities and horrendous working conditions (Jurgens, 2010). This environment motivated many within the human behavior discipline to advocate for the development of vocational guidance to create an educated craftsman to meet the workforce needs (Duggan & Jurgens, 2007).

Additionally, during the mid-to-late-nineteenth century, several proposals were drafted to create junior colleges to lighten universities' responsibility in providing general education to qualified high school graduates (Jurgens, 2010). Leaders, at the time, believed that universities in the U.S. should reflect the European model, which held universities responsible for traditional scholarship. While at the same time, junior colleges should focus on vocational and technical education (Kintzer & Bryant, 1998). This type of focus led to several significant developments that impacted two-year postsecondary institutions, including the Morrill Act of 1862 and the Morrill Act of 1890. The latter fostered educational opportunities in public higher for all students, including women and minorities. Cash was granted to each state to show that race was not a criterion for admissions or to designate separate land grants for minorities (Jurgens, 2010). Some of the land acquired through the Morrill Act of 1862 was sold, and the proceeds supported existing institutions along with the funding of new technical colleges (Cross, 1999).

Furthermore, in the early twentieth century, leaders in the United States recognized the severe need for a more trained and skilled workforce (Jurgens, 2010). Various factors, such as population, diversity, urbanization, and technology, severely impacted this need. Although there was an increased demand for a more educated workforce, studies showed that only one-third of high-school graduates, during the 20th century, decided to further their education, mainly due to distances from their homes to a college (Duggan & Jurgens, 2007). During the Great Depression of the 1930s, an increased focus on job training began to take place. To reduce widespread unemployment, community and technical colleges began to provide job training programs (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2003).

In 1947, U.S. President Harry Truman commissioned a report entitled “Higher Education for Democracy.” This report could be called the catalyst for what we now know as the modern

community college. Following WWII, there was a shortage of skilled workers to meet industry needs. Thousands of service members began returning home and enrolling in college using a new initiative called the GI Bill (Kim & Rury, 2007). This legislation provided significant educational opportunities for veterans. The report emphasized that students should have a good base of general education, that college teaching should be improved, and that higher education should be accessible to the masses. The report also noted that half of the nation's citizens could complete the first two years of college. Furthermore, the commission wanted two-year colleges to be fully integrated into the life of their communities, which made the term community college more appropriate than junior college.

During the 1960s, the number of two-year postsecondary institutions and their enrollment skyrocketed and there were approximately 460 institutions across the country (Jurgens, 2010). Additionally, student enrollment increased from around 1 million in 1965 to about 2.2 million by 1970 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2003). Enrollment continued to grow, and by 1980 over 4.3 million students were attending these institutions (Baker, 1994). During the 1970s and 1980s, these institutions began to embrace various partnerships specifically within workforce development. This led to an increase in joint ventures between community colleges and business and industry and created the League for Innovation programs. This organization partnered with various stakeholders to help create programs that would specifically meet business and industry needs.

History of the Technical College System of Georgia

According to Koon (2015), the origins of the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) date back to 1917. The Smith-Hughes Act, formally known as the National Vocational Education Act of 1917, provided federal aid to the states to promote precollegiate vocational

education in agricultural and industrial trades and in-home economics. The law required each state to create a state board of vocational education whose primary focus was to prepare students to enter the workforce. More than 7 million workers were trained vocationally for defense and war production employment during World War II (1941-1945).

In 1943, the Georgia state director of vocational education, M. D. Mobley, lobbied for a system of area trade schools. In 1944 the North Georgia Trade and Vocational School, the first vocational school in Georgia, opened in Clarkesville. The South Georgia Trade and Vocational School opened four years later in Americus. In 1958, State Supervisor of Trade and Industrial Education W.M. Hicks developed a set of policies for area vocational-technical schools that paved the way for a unified system of vocational training in Georgia (Koon, 2015). By the late 1960s, 19 vocational-technical schools had opened in the state. By 2006, 34 institutions were part of the system. Today, the TCSG consists of 22 institutions statewide that offer a wide variety of career-oriented programs that involve high-tech training and specialized skills. These programs are often tailored to meet the specific needs of the communities they serve through broad input from economic development groups, industry partners, and workforce improvement organizations.

Black Men and Two-year Colleges

There is a limited but growing body of literature that focuses on Black men and their lived experiences while attending a two-year postsecondary institution. The available literature shows that Black men who attend institutions such as technical and community colleges have similar challenges when it comes to retention and remediation as those attending Predominately White institutions (PWIs) or Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Among two-year postsecondary students, Black men have a 16% graduation rate, which is the lowest of

all minority groups (Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn (2012) noted that factors such as being academically underprepared, having lower socioeconomic conditions, and increased family responsibilities all have a potential negative impact on their lived college experiences. Black men are at an increased likelihood of prematurely departing from community colleges compared to men of other racial and ethnic groups (Wood, 2011; Wood & Hilton, 2012)

Despite the challenges Black men face when it comes to success, scholars credit two-year institutions such as technical and community colleges as the most effective route to degree attainment (Bass, 2011). Some scholars have gone as far as to suggest that two-year institutions serve as the sole opportunity to access higher education for Black men (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Pope, 2006). Nevertheless, in 2010 Bush and Bush asserted that the research on Black male students' academic success focused primarily on two schools of thought. The first school refers to individual characteristics, and the second is the school's attempts to understand the value of cognitive and non-cognitive variables. For example, Wood and Hilton (2012) examined factors impacting the academic success of Black men attending two-year postsecondary institutions. They found that many students believe that success begins with how committed and engaged they are in their academic studies.

Glenn (2007) found that some problems that deal with Black male students' persistence and retention are related to personal traits such as the lack of positive self-esteem, poverty, inadequate secondary education, low motivation, and cultural factors. Scholars such as Harris and Wood (2013) promoted the idea that when students of color do not feel connected with the institution and are less likely to persist with completing their academic goals. It is important to note that community and technical colleges have worked to create an environment that

specifically targets Black men by establishing initiatives aimed at increasing retention and graduation rates over the last 10 years.

Theoretical Framework

This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews to understand and re-story the lived experiences of successful Black men who have graduated from a technical college. The conceptual framework for this study was grounded in antideficit thinking (Valencia, 2010). An antideficit perspective presents a forward-thinking sensibility by identifying factors such as pedagogical practices, societal and environmental factors, as well as institutional, curricular, and co-curricular policies as factors associated with student success (Gourd & Lightfoot, 2009). Grounded within the antideficit framework, this study will use Mason's Model of Community College Persistence along with Harris' and Wood's Socio-ecological Outcomes Model to provide a thorough understanding for analyzing Black male technical college students' challenges, successes, and overall lived experiences.

H.P Mason's Model of Community College Persistence

Mason's (1998) model is essential for understanding this proposed study since he developed his ideas specifically for Black men at community colleges using background, academic, and environmental variables. Mason designed his model using a strengths-based perspective that highlights reasons students persist in their educational programs, rather than determining reasons students leave college (e.g., Tinto [1993] and Bean & Metzner [1985]).

Mason identified four variables that can positively impact retention:

1. Commitment to and internalization of educational goals.
2. Encouragement from family and friends.
3. Utility, i.e., a belief that education will positively affect the student's life.

4. The helplessness/hopelessness factor, which is the belief that no matter what a student does, it will not make a difference in his life; that his power to change or control certain elements is limited.

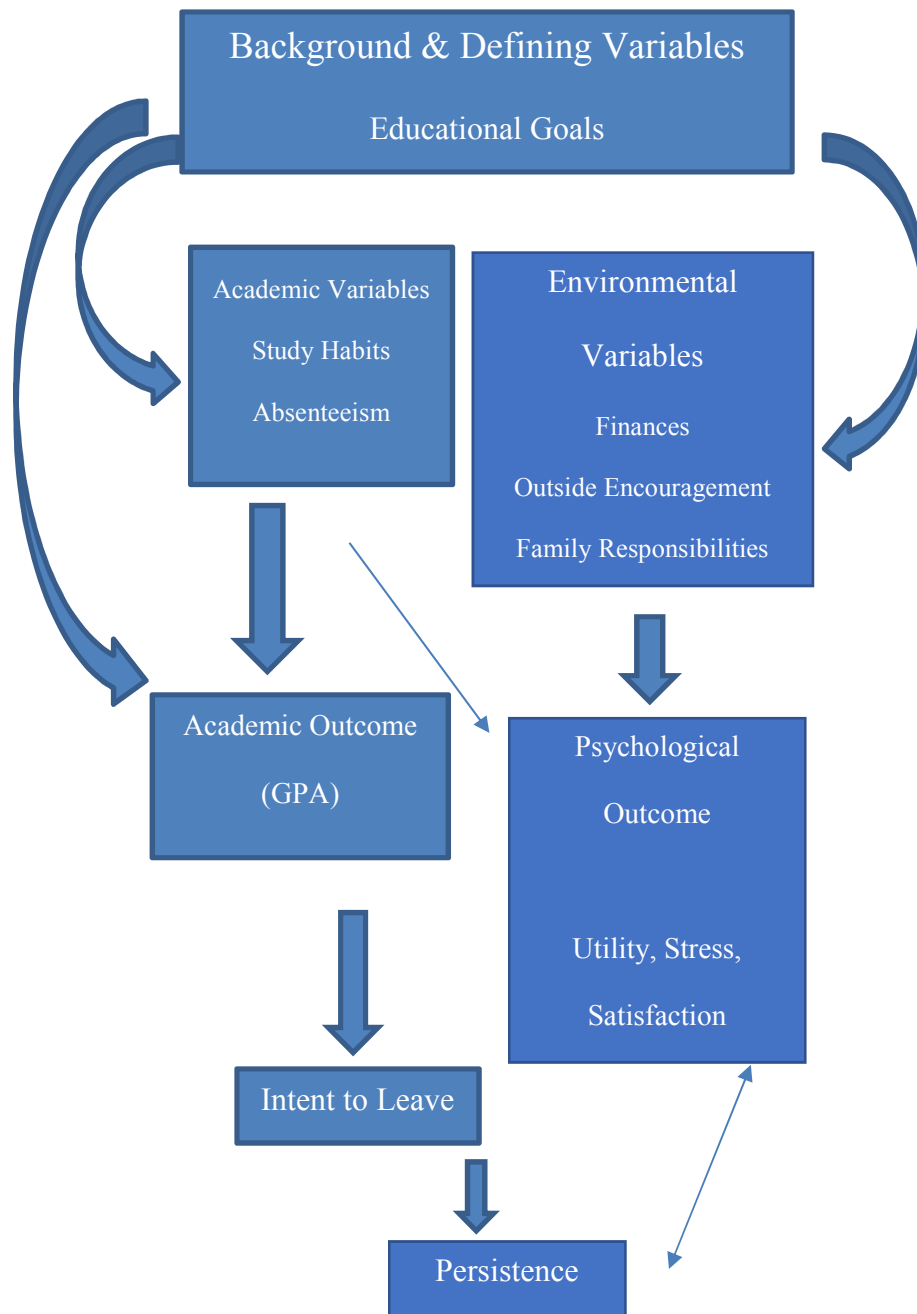


Figure 1. *A Conceptual Model for African American Male Community College Student Persistence*

Note: This figure summarizes multiple variables that impact persistence among Black men who enroll in community colleges adapted from “A Persistence Model for African American Male Community College Student Persistence”, by H.P. Mason, 1998, *Community College Journal of Research & Practice*, 22(8), 757.

The Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model

Harris and Wood (2012) articulated the Socio-Ecological Outcomes (SEO) model to address the literature gap as it relates to the challenges and success for men of color in community colleges. This model focuses on various factors such as persistence, achievement, and attainment for men who have been historically underrepresented in education, particularly men of color. The SEO emerged from *The Five Domains: A Conceptual Model of Black Male Success in Community Colleges* (Harris & Wood, 2012).

The five domains model focuses exclusively on Black male student success in community colleges and was based on an interdisciplinary synthesis of relevant literature and research on the experiences of Black men in postsecondary education, community college student success, Black masculinity, and Black identity development. Harris and Wood (2012) identified five factors that have been prioritized in scholarly discussions of the experiences and outcomes of Black men in community colleges: social factors, noncognitive factors, academic factors, environmental factors, and institutional factors. The examination of these factors, interactions among them, and their impact on academic success for Black men in community colleges led to the development of the Five Domains model.

Furthermore, the SEO model is also informed by Astin’s (1993) Input-Environment-Outputs (IEO) model. Astin proposed the IEO model to account for input variables or prior educational experiences and characteristics that students bring to the educational environment.

This helps to ensure that educators are better able to measure how educational variables affect student outcomes. According to Astin, “inputs” are the personal traits and characteristics that students bring to an educational program, the “environment” includes students’ actual experiences during the educational program, and “outputs” are the “talents” educators hope students develop by way of their involvement in the program.

Key Constructs of the SEO Model

As shown in Figure 2, the SEO model is composed of seven key constructs, each of which is depicted in rectangular boxes. The first two constructs in the SEO model—background/defining and societal factors—are described as inputs in that they account for the factors and experiences that occur for men of color prior to attending two-year postsecondary institutions such as community and technical colleges. These factors influence their success. Both students and educators have little control over these factors; yet, they can have an observable impact on student success for men of color if they are ignored or not considered in educational programming and service delivery (Wood & Harris, 2012). Student demographics (e.g., age, citizenship status, primary language), enrollment status (e.g., part-time, full-time), and levels of academic preparation are considered background or defining factors in the SEO model.

A host of background/defining factors are consistently noted in the published scholarship as having a significant influence on student success outcomes for men of color, notably their age (Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001), educational goals (Mason, 1998), and academic preparation (Hagedorn et al., 2001; Perrakis, 2008). Societal factors are also depicted as inputs in the SEO model. This factor captures the larger sociocultural forces that lead men of color to community colleges and the internalized societal messages that shape perceptions of men of color. For example, it is widely documented that most men of color who participate in

postsecondary education are enrolled at a community college and a critical mass of those who attend 4-year institutions began at a community college (Beginning Postsecondary Students, 2009).

Socio-Ecological Outcomes (SEO) Model

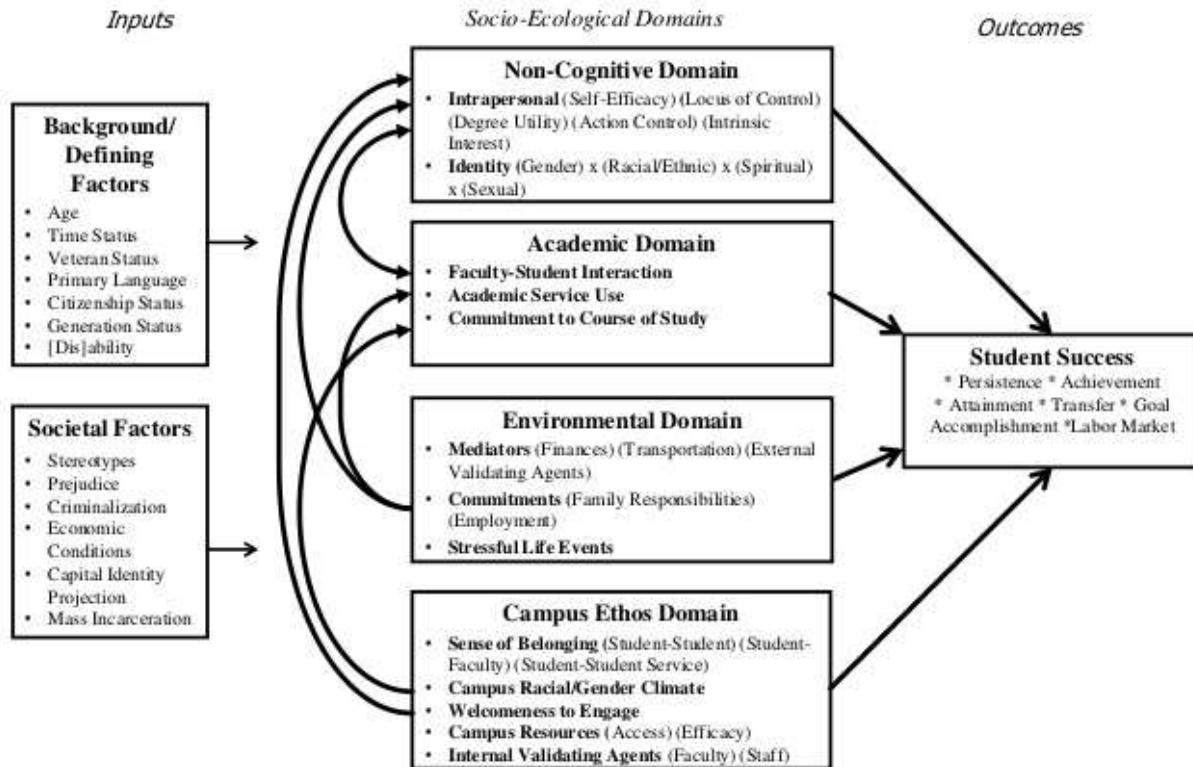


Figure 2. Harris and Wood present the Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model as means of predicting success for men of color in community colleges

Note: Used with permission, this figure was produced by Wood and Harris as a conceptual model of Black Male success within postsecondary education. Reprinted from *The Five Domains: A conceptual model of Black Male Success: A guide for p-12 and post-secondary educator* by F. Harris III and J.L. Wood, 2012. Stylus. Copyright 2012

The myriad of reasons men of color are disproportionately represented in community colleges (when compared to those who are enrolled at 4-year institutions) cannot be based solely on one model. However, some reasons may be economic in nature, whereas others may be attributed to the accessibility of community colleges. Racist stereotypes and prejudices about men of color, including academic inferiority, negative dispositions toward education, athletic prowess, and even criminal behavior, can lead educators and even men of color themselves to question the extent to which they belong and can succeed in community college (Bush, Bush, & Wilcoxson, 2009; Harper, 2009; Wood & Turner, 2010).

The four rectangular boxes positioned in the middle of the model represent its core and account for the experiences and interactions occurring after the matriculation of men of color to community colleges. These are factors that influence their success. Each of these domains is presented in the model as discrete spheres of activity, and relationships and interactions among them are fluid and dynamic. Moreover, we described these domains as “socio-ecological” because they capture the interplay between salient sociological and environmental factors that interact and shape student success outcomes for men of color in community colleges. These domains include the noncognitive domain, the academic domain, the environmental domain, and the campus ethos domain.

The *noncognitive domain* is composed of variables that are primarily psychosocial and captures students’ emotional and affective responses to social contexts and the person–environment interactions that take place within the institution. Intrapersonal factors, or those that are situated within the individual, are also important noncognitive considerations that influence student success outcomes for men of color. For instance, the extent to which students believe they are capable of being successful in college (self-efficacy), the amount of personal control

they assume they have for their success (locus of control), the value they place on obtaining a college degree or certificate (degree utility), and the energy and focus they invest toward their academic endeavors (action control) all come into play in shaping student success outcomes for men of color.

Regarding identity, given the SEO's model's focus on men of color, the interaction between race/ethnicity and gender, notably masculinity, must also be acknowledged. For men of color, the intersection between race and gender can complicate their college experiences in unique ways. Harris and Harper (2008) noted that men are socialized to view school settings as feminine spaces and, thus, may view academic activities like studying and participating in class as contradictory to the values they have learned to associate with masculinity. The conflict between masculinity and schooling can be experienced intensely for men from low-income underserved backgrounds who often feel pressure to fulfill the role of breadwinner in their homes. Thus, sacrificing earnings to attend school can be a difficult decision for these students.

The salience of racial/ethnic and gender identity in the experiences and outcomes of men of color in community colleges is reported in several key studies. For example, Gardenhire-Crooks et al. (2010) and Sutherland (2011) attributed negative experiences and interactions men of color reported having with faculty and administrators to judgments they made about these students based on their appearances (e.g., baggy clothes, tattoos, braided hair). Wood and Essien-Wood (2012) and Gardenhire-Crooks et al. (2010) also noted how internalized identity conflicts served as barriers to success in community college. Gardenhire-Crooks et al. (2010) found that for men of color, socialization as "breadwinners" led them to prioritize work and earning money over their engagement in academic endeavors. Wood and Essien-Wood (2012) found that men of color who embraced capitalistic values and measured their self-worth by their ability to acquire

material wealth and possessions were likely to experience negative outcomes in community college.

The academic domain consists of student interactions with faculty, student use of academic services, their commitment to their course of study, and other variables that are directly related to student academic experiences and outcomes. The interactions of students with faculty have been widely considered in the recent research on men of color in community colleges (e.g., Bush, Bush, & Wilcoxson 2009; Flowers, 2006; Wood, 2012; Wood & Turner, 2010). Generally, this research has concluded that although these interactions are integral to the success of men of color, they are reluctant to pursue faculty interaction because they have the perception that faculty are unsupportive and uncaring. The use of academic services such as tutoring and academic advising by men of color, (Glenn, 2003; Mason, 1998), and the extent to which they are committed to a course of study (Hagedorn et al., 2001; Mason, 1998), have also been identified as key variables within the academic domain that influences men of color and their success in community college.

The environmental domain of the SEO model captures important student commitments that occur outside of the institution. These commitments may direct the time, attention, and other resources of men of color away from their academic pursuits. External commitments that have been identified as especially salient among men of color are family responsibilities and employment (Mason, 1998). Stressful life events, such as a divorce, in the family, eviction/homelessness, or job loss, are also situated in the environmental domain because they have been identified by scholars as having a negative impact on persistence in community college (Freeman & Huggans, 2009; Wood & Williams, 2013). Although external commitments and stressful life events are believed to negatively influence the success of men of color in

community college, these commitments and events can be mediated by targeted support. For example, financial resources (e.g., grants, scholarships, book vouchers) that reduce the need to work full time off campus and transportation resources that reduce commuting time and make it easier for students to get to and from campus, can mediate the negative effects that external commitments may have on engagement and success in college for men of color.

In the campus ethos domain, institutional policies, programs, campus resources, and day-to-day practices influence the way students experience and succeed in community college (Wood & Harris, 2012). Many traditional models of student success place the responsibility for student success solely on students and disregard the role that institutional leaders and educators play in facilitating success. The SEO model emphasizes the institution's responsibility in creating and supporting a culture that is advantageous to learning and success for men of color and situate the factors that are necessary to do so in the campus ethos domain. Our conceptualization of student success is informed by Bensimon's (2007) concepts of equity-mindedness and institutional responsibility. According to Bensimon, equity-minded practitioners (e.g., faculty, administrators, student services professionals) attribute outcome disparities to institution-based dysfunctions rather than student deficits. Thus, when outcome inequities are viewed this way, practitioners are more likely to seek and apply strategies that focus on fixing the institution or adjusting their own practices rather than rely exclusively on strategies to remediate perceived student deficits.

A sense of belonging and connectedness for students to the campus are also key variables in the campus ethos domain. According to Hurtado and Carter (1997), sense of belonging is a concept that captures the individual's view of whether he or she feels included in the college community. Furthermore, they argued that student persistence and success in college is predicated on the extent to which students perceive the institutional environment as welcoming.

Finally, Hurtado and Carter concluded that student perceptions of the campus racial climate are a salient factor for Latino students' success. To varying degrees, findings from Perrakis (2008), Gardenhire-Crooks et al. (2010), Sutherland (2011), and Wood and Turner (2010) speak to why a sense of belonging and connectedness to the campus are factors that influences student success for men of color in community colleges. Findings from these studies confirm that perceiving the campus as accepting and affirming is vital to men of color's willingness to engage, seek help, and establish authentic relationships with faculty, student services professionals, and other students.

Campus resources that facilitate student success in college (e.g., academic advising, career counseling, transfer services, computer labs, tutoring) are also situated in the campus ethos domain of the SEO model. Findings and insights that have emerged from our research on the experiences of men of color in community colleges confirm that campus resources need not only be available but also accessible and efficacious for them to have a desired impact on student success for men of color. Institutional barriers that make key resources difficult to access will reduce the likelihood that men of color will seek them. For example, if the institution is not offering academic advising at a convenient time of the day, or academic advising is accessible only in person, then students may not use that service, regardless of how helpful advising may be (Wood & Harris, 2012). As for the efficacy of campus resources, once students have the opportunity to access them, they must see them as making a positive difference in their college experiences and having a meaningful impact on their success. The accessibility and efficacy of campus resources are especially important for men of color because the social construction of masculinity encourages men to embrace an attitude of independence and to avoid vulnerability or admit weaknesses. This often results in a negative disposition toward help-seeking (Harris &

Harper, 2008) and a reluctance among men to use campus support services. For example, men of color in Gardenhire-Crooks et al.'s (2010) study reported being reluctant to seek help with personal, academic and financial problems because they perceived doing so as a threat to their masculinity.

The outcomes variable of the SEO model is positioned at the far right. Essentially, we contend that dynamic and interdependent relationships among the key constructs of the SEO model, which consider the sociocultural experiences and backgrounds that men of color bring with them to community college as well as the experiences and interactions that take place within the socio-ecological domains, shape student success outcomes for these students in meaningful and observable ways. As such, persistence, degree and certificate attainment, achievement as measured by grade point average, transfer, and other student goals are the result of the constructs and interactions that are depicted in the model.

Theories Relevant to Collegiate Black Men

Significant theory models have been designed and employed to address the circumstances of minority students, particularly Black men within higher education. Researchers are focusing more on the identity development and success of Black men as they relate to college experiences. By understanding this type of behavior, colleges and universities can implement the appropriate social and educational experiences to ensure success for Black men (Harris et al. 2011).

Student development theories

Chickering and Reisser (1993), in their theory of student development, examined student services that assisted students with personal and emotional development. Results of this study suggested that students should have a basic foundational knowledge of college to progress. A student's ability to progress in college depends on their developmental journey. Chickering's

theory suggests that there are seven influences within the educational environment that impact a student's development: institutional objectives, institutional size, student-faculty relationship, curriculum, teaching, friendships and student communities, and student development programs (Hastings, 1999).

Student development theories often reflect how students struggle through the matriculation process when dealing with issues such as admissions, counseling, testing, and career placement. These theories are designed to focus on enhancing student supporting services that deal with a diverse population of students. According to Patton et al. (2007), student development theories target diversity and increase the understanding of individuals while enrolled in college. Researchers have relied on student development theories to enhance the campus environment.

Other student development theories have progressed to examine the racial meaning and the role of racism as it relates to students' learning and development (Henfield, Malik, Moore, James, & Wood, 2008). Theoretical models such as Cross's theory of racial identity development (Cross Racial Identity Scale – CRIS) gives several approaches that embrace the intellectual needs of African American male students (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

This theory advocates for useful interventions including appropriate teaching practices, promoting differences, including a safe space for sharing personal experiences, and exploring Black masculinity issues, which constructs leadership and vocational identity to increase interaction and build relationships among African American college males (Strayhorn, 2010). According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, three elements affect Black students' academic achievement levels: parental environment, teacher perceptions, and school environment. To improve personal and social growth and influence student learning among

Black men, the research suggests identifying theories related to individual developmental needs and connections with life experiences.

Tinto's Theoretical Longitudinal Models

Student retention is considered an essential factor for higher education success (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 1995). Tinto's models have analyzed the influence of persistence and other factors supporting students' departure from two-year postsecondary institutions including community and technical colleges. Essential elements noted by Tinto that led to successful academic integration include internal motivation, goal commitment, advancement, support, and search for knowledge. These attributes are important because they support student persistence and integrate social and academic development to influence student learning. Tinto's models suggest that voluntary withdrawal often occurs when there is minimal campus community involvement (Tinto & Love, 1995).

Tinto's (1993) retention model underscored student retention and the circumstances that can often influence students' early departure. Institutions employed various strategies, including retention models, to enhance the first-year experience for students in college. These strategies include student support services in the areas of social integration and academic achievement (Veenstra, 2009). Academic and social integration were essential aspects of Tinto's (1993) retention model and Astin's theory model on student involvement (Burks & Barrett, 2009). Astin's (1977) theory model explains that students who are actively involved and intricately connected to their college campus excel academically and often persist in higher education. "As long as students were satisfied with their academic experiences and took pride in their campus community, they persist in educational programs" (Janes, 1997). Bean and Metzner's (1985) attrition model specifically targeted non-traditional students and cited components similar to

those noted in Astin's theory and Tinto's models. Social variables were viewed as having an essential impact on departure decisions or perceived as leading indicators for student persistence (Meyer, Bruwelheide, & Poulin, 2009). Additional factors evolving from Astin's theory on student persistence were the perceptions of the college campus community, relationships established with other students, emotional support, and active involvement with the university (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

The African American Male Theory (AAMT)

Bush and Bush (2013) introduced the African American Male Theory (AAMT) (2013). Specifically, AAMT is viewed as a theoretical framework to "articulate the trajectory of African American boys and men in society" (add pp#). It also attempts to account for pre-and post-enslavement experiences to capture their spiritual, psychological, social, and educational development. The theory is also viewed as a development in men's studies while emanating from various traditions, including African-centered theory, critical race theory, and womanist theory (Wood & Palmer, 2015). African-American Male Theory closely examines six primary tenets for understanding the experiences of Black boys and men.

The first tenet of AAMT suggests that the individual and collective experiences of African American boys and men's lives are best analyzed using an ecological systems approach (Bush & Bush, 2013). This tenet particularly examines Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner argued that the interconnectedness of systems helps to shape the lives of Black boys and men. He further categorizes these interrelated structures into the following: microsystem, meso-system, exo-system, macro-system, and chrono-system.

In order to explain further, the microsystem captures the individuals own biology, personality, beliefs, and intellectual gifts and the interactions with familial, home, peer groups,

neighborhood, and school environments (Bush & Bush, 2013). Additionally, the mesosystem makes the links between the environments of the microsystem. For example, it explains the connection between home and school, family, and peer groups, etc. Exosystems are the external environmental settings along with community factors that impact an individual even if that person is not a direct participant. The exosystem can include factors such as a parent's place of employment or lack thereof. Bush and Bush (2013) define the macrosystem as a way to look at how larger cultures affect individual development. This could include regional, political, economic, or national culture. Finally, the chronosystem considers the pattern and arrangement of events and transitions which occur over time such as the change in career opportunities for women over the last several decades (Santrock, 2008).

Building on Bronfenbrenner's work, AAMT suggests that African American boys and men exist in a symbiotic and bidirectional relationship with other beings, matter, concepts, and phenomena. AAMT provides the conceptual framework to describe and analyze the interrelated structures, systems, and processes that occur in these environments and ultimately shape the developments, experiences, outcomes, and trajectory of African American boys and men (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997). There are two critical differences from Bronfenbrenner. First, AAMT divides the micro-system into two distinct categories known as the inner microsystem (biology, personality, and beliefs) and the outer microsystem (family, home, and peers) (Bush & Bush, 2013). The second key difference is that AAMT offers a new system known as the subsystem that recognizes Black men's supernatural, spiritual, and collective unconsciousness (Wood & Palmer, 2015). The subsystem provides the space to consider the influence and involvement of such matters as the supernatural and spirit (Cajete, 1994).

The second tenet of AAMT recognizes the unique realities of being male and of African descent. While AAMT affirms the uniqueness of other populations and groups, this tenet is especially focused on discovering more about Black men's unique experiences and perceptions (Wood & Palmer, 2015). The Black male experience within higher education is distinct. Through the understanding of this distinction, it will allow practitioners, through research, to continue to create specialized programs, pedagogies, and curricula that focus on meeting the needs of Black men. This is especially important in the technical and community college setting. Scholars such as Bass (2011) and Gebru (2009) suggest that these institutions serve as the most effective route for Black males' degree attainment.

Third, AAMT follows in the Afrocentric tradition by asserting that there is a continuation of African culture, consciousness, and biology in Black boys and men (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Simply put, the interdisciplinary study of Black boys and men must be anchored in Africa (Franklin, 1994; Harris & Ferguson, 2010). The analysis of this information requires a multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approach. Research on African American boys and men who do not consider Africa's impact in America is at risk of producing faulty or incomplete results (Bush & Bush, 2013).

The fourth tenet of AAMT is that African American boys and resilient. They are born with an innate desire for self-determination and an unlimited capacity for morality and intelligence (Bush & Bush, 2013). This point differs considerably from Black men's traditional stereotypes, which often display them as biologically and culturally deficient. Resilience theory interconnects with AAMT. It was first introduced by ecologist C.S. Holling (1973) to address the ability, capacity, and powers that people exhibit that allow them to rise above adversity.

The AAMT focuses on how African American boys, men, and systems reject White mainstream cultural hegemony and oppression (Bush & Bush, 2013). For example, Ogbu (1991) suggested that some African-Americans reject education because it is perceived as supporting their oppression. However, Bush (1997) challenged Ogbu (1991) by arguing that he confounded education and schooling. Bush saw schooling as the process used to maintain and continue asymmetrical power relations. At the same time, he defined education as “the process that should make people more capable of manifesting who they are as defined by their cultural and community norms” (pp #). Ultimately, AAMT considers all forms of resistance and opposition demonstrated by African American boys and men as a strength. Simultaneously, some manifestations may be counterproductive to what is viewed as success by White mainstream society (Bush & Bush, 2013).

The fifth tenet of AAMT examines the profound impact of race and racism, coupled with classism, on African American boys and men's lives. Like critical race theory, AAMT sees racism as an omnipresent force and factor in society (Bush & Bush, 2013). AAMT is also interested in understanding how being male and of a certain class may gain African American boys and men privilege in specific spaces and thereby seeks to be in dialogue with such perspectives (Abdulla, 2012; Cannon 1988). A vital aspect of this tenet is that race and the intersection of race with class and gender is prioritized above other forms of marginality such as disability, religion, or sexual orientation.

The sixth tenet of AAMT is the continuous pursuit of social justice. Bush and Bush (2013) noted that the research and practice relevant to Black boys and men's lives should be social justice-oriented in nature. Therefore, programs that do not focus on improving Black boys and men's lives are viewed as hegemonic. Additionally, AAMT intends to undermine oppression

by explicitly investigating, exposing, and correcting the policies, program, concepts, and institutions that promote its continuation (Young, 1990). Furthermore, AAMT is not seen as reactionary. It aims to draw upon the historical and current culture to achieve social justice for African American boys and men (Bush & Bush, 2013).

In conclusion, AAMT attempts to encourage scholars to move away from theories that tell the stories of native people only in relationship to those who have oppressed them. AAMT is multi-faceted and equipped to handle analyze experiences, phenomenon, and outcomes that are oppressive in the lives of Black boys and men, it equally has the capacity to examine why these same Black men and boys are resilient, healthy, and thriving (Bush & Bush, 2013). Ultimately, AAMT attempts to provide an authentic, native, and emic foundation for approaching future research regarding policy in various fields.

Expressions of Spirituality

Wood and Palmer (2015) noted that spirituality is an important element in understanding the identities of men of color. There has also been other research to support the importance of spirituality and religion. Specifically, Herndon (2003) examined the influence of spirituality on the academic lives of Black men. From this study, Herndon identified three primary ways Black men noted that spirituality reinforced their college persistence. It was shown that religion and spirituality served as a true coping mechanism for the challenges that many of these men faced during their pursuit of higher education.

According to Herndon (2003), the first expression of spirituality was resilience, which served as a vital factor for Black men. Herndon discussed how prayer, attending religious services, and reading items such as devotionals or scriptures helped Black men overcome the various challenges they faced and reduced their stress. Secondly, Herndon noted that spirituality

also provided Black men with a sense of direction, purpose, and focus on life. He stressed that spirituality allowed Black men to remain consistent with their academic plans and goals and ultimately refocused their commitment. The Black men in this study also noted how God directed their purpose in life. This level of spirituality heightened the importance and internalization of their goals (Wood & Palmer, 2015).

The final expression noted by Herndon was religious institutional support. Due to their religious connections and relationships, Black men received strong college support from religious institutional members. Specifically, these men received personal encouragement to continue with their college studies. In 2008 Riggins, McNeal, and Herndon conducted a replication study of Herndon's prior work. They found that religious institutional support continued in the form of mentorship from other Black men in those religious institutions. Collectively, Herndon's work noted that spirituality was an essential factor in the academic success of these Black men. It fostered resilience, provided a sense of purpose, and created a space for social connectedness to other Black men.

Institutional Factors that Impact the Lived Experiences of Black Men

Orientation and Pre-entry Counseling

Various programs and services are available to students enrolled in college. Pre-college or bridge programs are also available that help students make the transition to college life. One of the best-known support programs for underrepresented students, including Black men, is the federally funded TriO program. According to the U.S. Department of Education 2016, the TriO program is a blend of eight programs that serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post-baccalaureate programs. These programs can undoubtedly

be useful in the retention and success of college students. They often serve as structured interventions that are designed to ease the transition from high school to college (Slade, Eatmon, Staley, & Dixon, 2015). The authors stated that these programs exist to address academic deficiencies and help advance students from developmental courses to credit courses while helping acclimate them to college life.

Student Support Services

Many studies share alarming statistics about Black men and their struggles within higher education, but only a few emphasize the academic and overall success of Black men in college. “We know a heck of a lot more about why, how, and where Black men fail than we do about how and why they are successful,” says James Minor, director of higher education programs at the Southern Education Foundation. Furthermore, when it comes to Black men there has been so much information shared about our struggles which have conditioned many people to assume that there’s all there is. Nevertheless, in recent years programs to help men of color succeed in college have grown drastically. These programs focus on delivering a wide range of academic, social, and emotional support systems to help students with postsecondary success. Bush and Bush (2010) also noted that two-year institutions can take several steps to improve the overall experience of their Black male students. Those steps include the development of on-campus programs that address the needs of Black men, assigning faculty mentors to Black male students when they arrive on campus, establishing adequate orientation programs, developing small learning communities for Black men, and employing faculty and staff who are dedicated to improving the success rate of Black men within higher education.

One program that has been developed and is currently being used in North Carolina is the Minority Male Success Initiative, formerly known as the Minority Male Mentoring Program.

This program has a strong student focus and has been designed to support the academic and professional aspirations of male students of color enrolled in two-year community colleges throughout the state of North Carolina. The goals of this program focus on mentorship or relationship building with campus coaches, academic skills training, strong academic advising, and service-learning projects. During the 2015-2016 academic year, the program served approximately 1,200 students representing roughly 4% of the systems' minority male population. Overall, the program seeks to improve student success outcomes for men of color by encouraging colleges to make a three-year commitment to assess and enhance the student success outcomes of minority male students.

Additionally, the Striving Black Brothers Coalition (SBBC) at Chabot College in Hayward, California, is dedicated to serving men of color. Created in 2006, SBBC is described as an on-campus voluntary support group dedicated to increasing retention, persistence, and graduation rates among Black men. The program has worked to identify the challenges that these students face when achieving academic success at the college level. Their work focuses on academic advising, academic skills training, leadership training, mentorship, and special events. Within these areas, there are seminars, community service opportunities, faculty mentoring sessions, and numerous other events dedicated to improving success among the Black male student population. Since its existence, this program has served over 275 students and has received multiple awards, including the National Council on Black American Affairs 2015 Vanguard Student Success Program Award and the Western Regional Council on Black American Affairs 2015 Award.

The Development of Mentoring Programs

Two-year institutions such as community and technical colleges have long valued mentorship as a positive avenue to increase persistence, retention, and graduation rates for Black men. Studies on best practices and the effectiveness of college mentoring programs have been limited. However, there is some insight from the existing literature. Mentoring can be used to develop both peer-to-peer or adult-to-peer relationships that foster a sense of inclusion, support, and guidance on dealing with personal as well as academic issues that may arise during their college career (Kruglaya, 2018). A national study conducted by ACT (2010) discovered that mentoring programs designed to improve the persistence rate of Black men had a positive impact on their college experience and resulted in an increased number of Black men who were interested in completing their degree. Wood (2012), argues that once a student enters a two-year technical or community college, the institution should establish formal or informal mentoring relationships that help students understand the importance of school-life balance. This type of support is necessary and helps develop bonds that allow for encouragement and support when required. Mentoring programs are seen as avenues to help Black men better understand their roles as college students (Kingsbury, 2007) and encourage a sense of belonging within institutions of higher learning (Harper & Quaye, 2007). Baker (2007) also noted that mentoring increases faculty-student interactions and provide access to resources related to career placement for Black students. A similar point was made by Carson (2009), who noted a sense of increased connectedness among Black men who participated in college mentoring.

Curriculum and Instruction

Studies show that engaged and involved students tend to persist, perform well academically, and ultimately graduate (Adelman, 2006; Astin, 1993; Seidman, 2005; Tinto,

1993). Tinto's 2000 work about student learning and attrition describes the classroom experience as central to student success. This work included an in-depth look at how colleges were rethinking the classroom experience. His research on learning communities included LaGuardia and Seattle Central Community Colleges. Throughout the process, Tinto discovered that learning communities are successful because they focus on several key areas: building supportive peer groups, creating a shared learning experience, increasing student involvement, effort, learning and persistence.

Likewise, student-faculty relationships and interactions are essential to student success (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). Braxton et al. (2000) argue that academic integration is a phenomenon to be considered not only when looking at student attrition but also with what happens in the classroom. Tierney (2000) argues pedagogies that affirm minority students are in concert with the learning communities' concept. Tinto explains that most students continue to experience college as isolated learners whose learning is disconnected from that of others, and they engage in solo performance and demonstration in what remains largely a show-and-tell learning environment.

However, learning communities provide students and faculty with an energetic environment to work collaboratively in ways that maximize the learning experience for students. Faculty and institutional members in teaching-learning positions must integrate student development theories in order to help prevent Black men from becoming disengaged from the campus community (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, and Gabelnick (2004) characterize learning communities as curricular approaches that bring together clusters of courses that are often centered on a common theme and enroll a common group of students.

Additionally, Kuh et al. (2010) advocates for intrusive and well-orchestrated peer interaction as it encourages students to engage in meaningful ways and ultimately helps create a climate that fosters student success, and it supports Tinto's assessment of the value of learning communities. Learning communities contribute to building classroom environments that promote the type of faculty-student and peer relationships that the literature including Rendon et al. (2000) and Dawson-Threat 1997, asserts is necessary to promote Black Male students' retention and persistence.

External Factors Impacting the Lived Experiences of Black Men

Environmental or external factors often known as "environmental pull" are circumstances often external to the institution, however, they impact the students within it (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Freeman & Huggans, 2009). For example, Cuyjet (2006) and Hampton (2002) acknowledged how the family unit serves as a critical source of support and encouragement for Black male college students. These scholars suggest that families are involved in establishing a positive identity for Black male students and serve as a solid foundation for students to develop confidence and a sense of belonging within the academy. Watson (2006) emphasized that positive self-images for Black male students are generated from family role models and high expectations. When students feel as if they are supported in their academic endeavors, they are more likely to persist (Mason, 1998).

Secondly, the family is a conduit for educational attainment for Black men for several reasons. Herndon and Hirt (2004) shared that families are the primary sources of academic potential as they work to develop and nurture the student's capacity for learning. Families also work to set the standards within the home environments, and these standards affect the student's outlook on a larger social order. Third, parents and other family members are influential in

creating the context in which events and phenomena are evaluated, including how students evaluate education. This can occur through school choice, career options, and overall higher educational aspirations (Teachman & Paasch, 1998).

Further research indicates that persistence is increased when they perceive their degree pursuits to be worthwhile endeavors, which is referred to as degree utility (Mason, 1998). Wood (2011) also emphasizes the importance of utility stating that “many Black men may experience a utility conflict, meaning that their perceptions of the benefits of school conflict with their experiences and immediate needs” (p.24). While these men understand the importance of school, external pressures to meet their basic needs can often lead to the prioritization of goals above their education (Wood & Williams, 2013).

Relevant Research Studies

Cuyjet (2006) emphasized studies that have produced empirical data regarding factors associated with Black college student success. These studies were focused mainly on matriculation, and it is Black women who have been the recipients of targeted college programs. Meanwhile, Black male students were trailing behind in terms of their enrollment and degree attainment, as well as interventions that are especially targeted to address the issues they face and support their success (Wood, 2012). The issue of Black student success is compounded by a lack of research studies and academic works that could be used to inform the development of empirically based college intervention and student support programs (Wood, 2012). Cuyjet (2006) cites there are many studies related to peripheral issues like college faculty, public school factors, and sociological factors inherent in the Black community; however, studies that focus more centrally on Black male college students are needed to further the Black male college student success agenda.

Secondly, Cartright and Henriksen (2012) provided insight into a qualitative research study concentrated on Black male college students who grew up without a father presence in the home. The importance of the study was attributed by the authors to the growing number of Black male college students who grew up fatherless and the impact on their attainment potential. Research shows “the importance of familial support, particularly for Black students, in advancing their educational success” (Cartright & Henriksen, 2012, p. 30). Various themes appeared throughout the research findings which can be helpful to policy makers and practitioners in providing specific support for Black male college students. The participants stated that having a male role model or mentor was important given the absence of their fathers in their lives. They also emphasized the importance of their mothers and the uniqueness of motherly support they received. They also expressed a strong desire to obtain a college education. Lastly, even in the absence of their own fathers, they all reported a high level of respect of fathers who were in their son’s lives. One theme that was perhaps most significant was their desire to break the stereotype of becoming Black male deadbeat fathers, by earning a degree and being able to support a family. The practical application for colleges and universities is to recognize there are extensive populations of this nature that could benefit from mentoring and being connected to a Black male role model.

Additionally, Palmer and Young (2009) acknowledged that research has been lacking regarding the disaggregation of the experiences by academic achievement, especially students who are academically under-prepared to persist through degree completion. Comparatively, Cuyjet (2006) raised the issue of a lack of research study data on Black college students disaggregated by gender, while Spradley (2001) indicated there is a deficit in research study data on Black college male students in that the research focuses mainly on traditional-aged students,

and not on adult learners. Cuyjet (2006) also states that studies indicate the resolve of traditional-age Black male students to leave college is a result of a numerous factors, such as lack of funding, insufficiencies in social, cultural and academic integration and failure to connect with the institution. Spradley (2001) cites a U.S. Census Bureau 2001, report that indicates the number of non-traditional Black male students, 25 years old and over attending college, was up from 143,000 in 1990, to 267,000 in 1995, to 335,000 in 2000.

Nevertheless, colleges and universities have recently had to adapt to large numbers of veterans whose tours of duty in service have ended. Institutions have also had to continue efforts to address the academic and developmental needs of the Black adult male student. Even though consensus suggests there is a need for additional research, there are studies that have helped to inform the manner in which policy makers and practitioners provide support for Black male college students. For example, Palmer and Young (2009) stated a multitude of research studies have examined the Black male experience in colleges and universities in terms of the support, opportunities and challenges they face at predominantly White institutions, as compared with Black colleges and universities. Overall, the findings supported the idea that Black male students have more meaningful learning experiences, are more engaged, and persisted at higher rates at Black institutions. More particularly, Black students at White colleges and universities had lower success, as evidenced by their persistence rates, academic achievement, and transition to higher degrees, thus propelling the conclusion that Black male students thrive best educationally at predominantly Black institutions (Bush & Bush, 2010; Harper & Quaye, 2008; Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008).

Furthermore, Harper (2010) argued that too many reports and published research on Black STEM students continue to focus on determining why student enrollment is not robust and

why student achievement is not on par with White and Asian students. He emphasized the importance of using an anti-deficit focus to instead examine the background and experiences of Black students who enrolled and were successful. His National Black Male College Achievement Study (NBMCAS) studied Black male students at various points in their studies. The target population of the study was students with grade point averages of 3.0 and above who were actively engaged in student life, established relationships with college personnel, and were the product of high impact practices such as research and internships. 51 Black male STEM majors were interviewed about the persons and experiences that empowered their achievement. Anti-deficit framed research questions focused on what enabled students to make the dean's list and compete for research fellowships and internships; factors that motivate students to pursue degrees in STEM fields and how students persist in STEM disciplines in spite of rigor and lack of Black peers and faculty, were also among the research questions. Participants reported that having Black male peers and faculty solidified their sense of belonging in their STEM program. They mentioned that their involvement in organizations like the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) enabled them to develop relationships with other Black men and strengthen their resolve to pursuing a STEM degree and career.

Summary

This qualitative study was designed to gain an understanding of the experiences that influence college success and degree attainment for Black men who graduated from a technical college. The main objective of this study was to recognize the positive stereotypes about Black men regarding their educational attainment, capacity for college completion, and assimilation in the mainstream workforce. Black men are completing college degrees and using their education and skillset to successfully transition into the workforce. Highlighting the achievements of Black

men also serve as a motivational tool to encourage other Black men to strive for success and realize their potential. Secondly, creating the opportunity for these men to share their stories has the capacity to strengthen their resolve allowing further development both intellectually and professionally. A complimentary objective of this study is to help influence educational policy that focuses on improving outcomes for Black men as they navigate their educational environment.

Furthermore, the findings from this study should encourage colleges to focus on factors that hinder the success of Black men within two-year postsecondary institutions. Examining the lived personal experiences of these students while enrolled could help educators develop better practices and policies geared towards diversity in higher education along with elaborate multicultural education services that promote retention, graduation, and workplace readiness. What is clear is that Black men do share retention challenges such as paying for college, family environment, and academic preparation. However, Black men that were successful in their college experience shared common factors as well, including engaged faculty members, a sense of connectedness with the institution, and various student support services. The subsequent chapter will explain the proposed research design and methodology that will be used to conduct this specific study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand and share the experiences of Black men who have graduated from a technical college and to examine their perspectives about influences on their success. Creating the opportunity for Black men to share insights about their educational accomplishments has the capacity to strengthen their resolve and confidence within other areas of their life. Also, understanding these experiences can help higher education decision-makers enact policies and processes that will enable Black men who are technical college students to succeed. Improvements in degree completion rates for Black men have positive implications for a better quality of life for this population and the potential for greater contributions to the socioeconomic prosperity in our communities.

Research Questions

1. Why do Black men decide to attend a two-year technical college?
2. How would they describe their overall college experience?
3. What forces or factors do Black men who have graduated from a technical college credit for their success?
 - (a) What internal or familial forces were most beneficial to college experience?
 - (b) What institutional or external forces were most beneficial to their college experience?

Research Design

When conducting research, it is vital that both the design and methods used are appropriate to fully address the research questions. The overall goal of the study should determine the choice of the design (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017). The research design outlines how the research purpose and questions are addressed using particular methods (Patton, 2015). This study is designed to explore the lived experiences of Black men who have graduated from a technical college. The research design outlines how the research questions, and the purpose of the research are addressed by using particular methods (Patton, 2015). This study is designed to explore the lived experiences of Black men who have graduated from a technical college.

Qualitative research is carried out to enhance understanding of individuals' cultures, values, and human experiences, as well as to develop theories that describe these experiences (Holloway & Galvin, 2016; Munhall, 2012). This research approach emerged from the behavioral and social sciences as a method of understanding the unique, dynamic, and holistic nature of human beings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Unlike a quantitative research approach that utilizes numerical data to access information about the world, qualitative research does not transform verbal symbols into numerical data, rather participants' and researcher's words are used to describe the phenomenon being studied (Holloway & Galvin, 2016; Sarantakos, 2013). Qualitative research aims to understand the core of what happened to participating individuals, what led them to decisions made, and how choices took the form they did.

According to Maxwell (2012), qualitative research views reality in terms of people, situations, and events, then attempts to understand the processes that connect them. Qualitative research studies can provide details about human behavior, emotion, and personality characteristics. This type of research is best suited to address a research problem in which you do

not necessarily know the variables and you need to learn more from participants through exploration (Creswell & Gutterman, 2019).

The main objectives of this qualitative methodology was to produce in depth information to understand the lived experiences of Black men that have graduated from a technical college. Qualitative research is concerned with aspects of reality that cannot be quantified, focusing instead on the understanding and explanation of the dynamics of social relations (Atieno, 2009). According to Maxwell (2013), qualitative research works with the universe of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values, and attitudes, which corresponds to a deeper space of relationships, processes and phenomena that cannot be reduced to the operationalization of variables.

Furthermore, Creswell (1997) explained that a qualitative study is “an inquiry into the process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (p. 2). Qualitative research methods focus participants’ experiences and embrace the contextual nature of those experiences. Qualitative researchers are focused extensively on the process of the experience (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). Although previous studies have explored problems experienced by Black men within higher education, few have examined factors contributing to the success of these men or analyzed their perspectives (Davis, 1994). Significant achievement among Black men has occurred within technical colleges as these institutions continue to establish acceptable practices that focus on retention, persistence, and graduation (Warde, 2008).

Qualitative Interview Design

For qualitative researchers, the most widely employed tool for collecting information is interviews (Cassell, 2005). An interview is a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004). These questions give participants the opportunity to express their opinions, thoughts, and perspectives regarding specific experiences. Maccoby and Maccoby (1954) defined the interview as a “face to face” verbal interchange in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinions or belief from another person or persons” (p. 499). Merriam (1998) and other qualitative methodologists view the interview as a conversation between two people that is focused on a specific research topic. Although researchers set out to design the interview as a conversation, it is much different from an everyday conversation between two people (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004). Denzin (2001) argued that interviews are not simply a method for gathering information, but instead a vehicle for producing information about self and society.

As common with quantitative analyses, there are various forms of interview designs that can be developed to obtain thick and rich data using a qualitative design (Creswell, 2007). In order to understand the lived experiences of Black men participating in this study, the semi-structured individual interview will be conducted. The semi-structured interview is defined as a method of data collection designed to ascertain subjective responses from persons regarding a situation or phenomenon that they have experienced (Morse, 2012). This interviewing technique will use pre-planned questions; however, the interviewees will be given the chance to elaborate to provide depth and richness regarding their responses. This type of framework and flexibility is what constitutes the semi-structured aspect of this design.

Participants and Sampling

Participants for this study were selected through purposeful sampling using specific criteria. Purposeful sampling is an approach in which a researcher sets out to decisively identify and choose a sample from which the researcher can learn the most (Merriam, 2009). The purposive sampling technique, also referred to as judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of participants due to the qualities they possess (Etikan et., al 2016). This type of non-random technique does not focus on having a set number of participants. It allows researchers to decide what needs to be known and sets out to identify people who are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience (Etikan et., al 2016). Ultimately, purposeful sampling allows for the selection of participants that are well-informed regarding the phenomenon under study. Finally, this type of sampling also focuses on candidates who share similar characteristics or life experiences. The idea is to focus on these similarities and how they relate to the topic being researched.

In qualitative research, selection of respondents does not follow procedures used in quantitative sampling because the purpose is not to count opinions or people but to explore various experiences (Gaskell, 2000). Thus, sampling in qualitative research is concerned with the richness of information (Kuzel, 1992) Therefore, the number of participants required, therefore depends on the nature of the topic (Gaskell, 2000). Furthermore, Marshall (1996) argued that the researcher should be pragmatic and flexible in their approach to sampling noting that an adequate sample size is one that sufficiently answers the research questions.

The Technical College System of Georgia consists of three regions (North, Central, and South). Seven participants, including at least two from each region were selected in order to get a

sense of the lived experiences of a typical student and to understand the commonality of experiences within and across regions. This also allowed for a geographically diverse population of Black men to share their experiences attending college in a rural, suburban, or urban areas. Seven participants were recruited for this study to ensure data saturation. Saturation means that a researcher can be reasonably assured that further data collection would yield similar results and serve to confirm emerging themes and conclusions (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017). This study attempts to highlight these unique experiences and in order to understand them, Creswell (2007) suggests that the researcher focus on the common experiences of the participants.

When researchers are insiders to the group that they are examining, then a first place to begin is to start with people who are known (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Recruiting potential participants for this study included seeking recommendations from people who have direct experience working with students in the technical college setting. For example, I setup preliminary meetings with academic advisors and academic program directors from various technical colleges through the state of Georgia to ask for recommendations. During these meetings I shared the study introduction letter (see Appendix A), the invitational flyer (see Appendix D), and answered any questions regarding the study. This group of faculty and staff members have direct knowledge of Black men who have graduated from various programs at their specific colleges. Once identified, these participants were sent a copy of the invitation to participate in the study.

Data Collection

Researcher participant

The qualitative researcher's perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others—to indwell—and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Insider research describes the process when researchers conduct research with populations of which they are also members (Kanuha, 2000) so that the researcher shares an identity, language, and experiential base with the study participants (Asselin, 2003). The complete membership role gives researchers a certain amount of legitimacy and frequently allows researchers more rapid and more complete acceptance by their participants. One's membership automatically provides a level of trust and openness in your participants that would likely not have been present otherwise. There is a level of commonality that affords access into groups that might otherwise be closed to outsiders (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Therefore, participants are typically more open with researchers so that there may be a greater depth to the data gathered (Adler & Adler, 1987).

Although this shared status can be very beneficial as it affords access, entry, and a common ground from which to begin the research, it has the potential to hinder the research process as it progresses (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). The participant could in fact make assumptions of similarity and therefore fail to explain their individual experience fully. It is also possible that the researcher's perceptions might be clouded by their personal experience and that as a member of the group they will have difficulty separating it from that of the participants. This might result in an interview that is shaped and guided by the core aspects of the researcher's

experience and not the participant's. Also, its undue influence might affect the analysis, leading to an emphasis on shared factors between the researcher and the participants and a de-emphasis on factors that are discrepant, or vice versa (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

There are costs and benefits to be considered regarding the insider versus outsider status of the researcher. Being an insider might raise issues of undue influence of the researcher's viewpoint but being an outsider does not create immunity to the influence of personal perspective (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Furthermore, although there might be cautions to being a member of the group studied, for many, access to the group would not be likely if the researcher was not a member of that group. The positive and negative elements of each were carefully assessed.

Being a member of the group under investigation does not unduly influence the process in a negative way (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Disciplined bracketing and detailed reflection on the subjective research process, with a close awareness of one's own personal biases and perspectives, might well reduce the potential apprehensions associated with insider membership. Furthermore, one does not have to be a member of the group being studied to appreciate and adequately represent the experience of the participants. Instead, we conceive that the core ingredient is not insider or outsider status but an ability to be open, authentic, honest, and deeply engaged in the experience of one's research participants and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience.

As a doctoral student learning to conduct qualitative research, I was excited about the opportunity, and I chose to actively participate in this study by sharing my lived experience as a Black man who has graduated from a technical college. My story was shared in the form of an interview that was conducted prior to the data collection from the other participants. Sharing my

personal experience and reflecting on my interview proved valuable in providing context for understanding the data that will be collected and coded through the participant interviews. My participation proved integral in understanding the breadth of experiences for Black men who are part of the study population.

Interviews

The data collection stage is an essential part of the qualitative research process. During this period, the researcher needs to reflect on the kind of methodologies adopted along with the techniques used for collecting the data and their appropriateness to answering the research question (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017). Additionally, interviews are among the most familiar strategies for collecting qualitative data (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Fontana and Frey (2000) described the individual interview as one of the most powerful tools for gaining an understanding of human being and exploring topics in depth. Ultimately, interviews can elicit rich information about personal experiences and perspectives. Individual interviews also allow for a level of spontaneity, flexibility, and responsiveness during the data collection process. Interviews serve as platform to get to know the interviewee better. However, the purpose of that knowing varies according to the research question and the disciplinary perspective of the researcher (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Therefore, some research is designed to test a priori hypotheses, often using a very structured interviewing format in which the stimulus (questions) and analyses are standardized, while other research seeks to explore meaning and perceptions to gain a better understanding and or generate hypotheses (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The purpose of the qualitative research interviews used in this study will help to contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual, theoretical, and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the interviewees.

Protocols of questions developed by the researcher guided the interviews. Development of the interview protocol was guided by question types suggested by Patton (2002) and Morgan et al. (1997). The goal of the interview questions was to also address the needs of the participants and focus on the issue within the current study as suggested by Creswell (2005). By using the research questions as a guide, I was able to explore the lived experiences of Black men and understand the factors that influenced their academic achievement while they were enrolled in a technical college. The research questions are: (1) Why did you elect to attend a two-year college and what was your overall experience? (2) What factors do you believe contributed to your success? (a) What internal or familial support services were most beneficial to your college experience? (b) What institutional or external forces were most beneficial to your college experience?

Interviews are often the sole data source for a qualitative research project (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Interviews for this study were scheduled in advance at a designated time and location convenient for participants. An interview script (see Appendix E) was read to each participant to ensure they understand the overall study and provide the opportunity to ask any questions related to the study along with the interview process. The interview protocol consisted of 11 open-ended questions that support the research questions. The interview questions were organized in a way that allowed the participants to begin by sharing their general information about their academic experiences followed by questions that seek to identify motivational factors and supportive mechanisms such as peers, family, etc. that were beneficial during their college experience. Finally, we concluded with questions relating to obstacles and other perspectives that challenged the participants' college experiences.

According to Creswell (2003), “Interviews involve semi-structured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants” (p. 188). This flexibility allows the researcher to enter into the places and times that participants feel are essential. According to Minichiello et al. (1990) “the individual interview is always a controlled conversation, which is geared to the interviewer’s research interest” (p. 93). The development of the interview questions was under the assumption that they will address the needs of the participants and focus on the issue within the current study as explained by Creswell (2005). The questions helped to ensure that the interaction between the participants and the researcher occurs without imposing an unnatural flow. Table 1 outlines the interview questions within the interview protocol.

Table 1

Interview Question Outline

Research Questions	Interview Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Why do Black men decide to attend a two-year technical college?2. How would they describe their overall college experience?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What was your main reason for attending a two-year technical college?2. How would you describe your academic experiences during your first year in college?3. Do you feel that faculty and staff on campus were supportive of you as a Black male completing your college degree?4. When considering your outside responsibilities, was it a challenge to complete your education?5. Do you feel that your educational experiences were different based on your race? Why or why not?6. What would you tell administrators or policymakers regarding your educational experiences?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">3. What forces or factors do Black men who have graduated from a technical college credit for their success?<ol style="list-style-type: none">(a) What internal or familial forces were most beneficial to college experience?(b) What institutional or external forces were most beneficial to their college experience?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What were the college factors that you believe contributed to your success?2. Did you use any academic support services while you were enrolled as a student?3. Did you have a mentor to help guide you through various phases of the college process?4. How encouraging was your family (spouse, children, parents, etc.) when it came to finishing your degree?5. Were you involved with campus activities and programs? Why or why not?

Data Saturation

The concept of data saturation can often be neglected because it is such a hard concept to define (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation refers to the point in the research process when no new information is discovered in data analysis, and this redundancy signals to researchers that data collection may cease. Additionally, failure to reach data saturation has an impact on the quality of research conducted and impedes content validity (Bowen, 2008; Kerr, Nixon, & Wild, 2010). When deciding on a study design, the researcher should aim for one that is clear regarding how data saturation is reached. Data saturation is reached when there is enough information to

replicate the study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012), when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible (Guest et al., 2006).

Furthermore, it is important to note that there is not a one-size-fits-all method to reach data saturation as study designs are not all universal. Again, data saturation is not necessarily about the number of participants, but about the richness of the data (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012). Nevertheless, saturation is a convincing concept but has several practical weaknesses, especially as in some cases the number of emergent themes can be potentially limitless (Green & Thorogood, 2004). This is because each story is unique and, in this sense, data are never truly saturated as there will always be new things to discover (Wray et al., 2007).

Once participants were selected, I met with them to introduce the study, discuss the study's requirements along with the participants' expectations (see Appendix A). This was also the opportunity to distribute and discuss the informed consent process and present each participant with a consent form that must be completed prior to participating in the study (see Appendix B). Informed consent is a mechanism for ensuring that people understand what it means to participate in a particular research study so they can decide in a conscious, deliberate way whether they want to participate. Informed consent is one of the most important tools for ensuring respect for persons during research (Mack, 2005). The first task in achieving informed consent was to inform people about the research in a way they can understand. Written consent was required before participation. Written consent means that a person receives a written form that describes the research and then signs that form to document his or her consent to participate (Mack, 2005).

Data Analysis

Data analysis included listening to each audio recording and reviewing the subsequent transcription from the individual interviews to ensure accuracy. Merriam (2009) asserted that one of the most efficient and meaningful ways to analyze data in a qualitative study is to analyze inductively during the data collection process. Thomas (2006) defines and describes the inductive approach as a method to analyze data and provide details about the procedures used. The purposes for using this approach are to (a) condense raw data into a brief, summary format; (b) to establish clear links between the research objective and the summary findings derived from the raw data and (c) to develop a model or theory about the underlying experiences or processes that are evident in the raw data (Thomas, 2006). The inductive approach works by reflecting frequently reported patterns used in qualitative data analysis. It provides a convenient and efficient way of analyzing qualitative data for many research purposes (Thomas, 2006). This approach allows researchers to further focus the study, make important decisions about the study as it progresses such as the need for additional information from the respondents or the enhancement of questions given the responses of previous respondents (Merriam, 2009). During the transcriptions review, an inductive analysis will be used to identify narrative areas and search for patterns that directly correlate to the research questions.

The Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software MaxQDA was used to organize the retrieval of relevant data to develop individual narratives and the subsequent coding and categorization of themes. QDA software are programs intended to support the tasks of qualitative researchers. They are programs developed within the culture of qualitative research and specifically designed for the purpose of supporting that research (Gilbert, Jackson, & Di Gregorio, 2014). According to Lewins and Silver (2007), QDA software programs provide

fundamental capabilities which include the ability to assign multiple codes to a single portion of text, cross-reference the relationships among codes for constellations or patterns, import data as a means of comparing subgroups in the data, track researcher ideas using links and memos, and finally provide output in the form of reports that can be used for analysis and presentation of findings outside of the software.

The inductive analysis process allowed me to develop narratives that can be emailed to each participant. These narratives are stories that describe life experiences of the individuals involved. Participants reviewed the narratives and provided necessary comments and feedback to ensure accuracy.

Furthermore, coding was used during the data analysis process as it provides the researcher with the opportunity to sift through the informant's responses and organize similar words and phrases. According to Merriam (2009), coding facilitates making sense of one's qualitative research study. Codes serve as a basis for discussion as the researcher collects and codes the actual data until the researcher is content that the codes explain the phenomenon under study. Coding in qualitative research is comprised of processes that enable collected data to be assembled, categorized, and thematically sorted, providing an organized platform for the construction of meaning.

Open coding was the first level of coding. In open coding, the researcher is identifying distinct concepts and themes for categorization. The first level of data is organized by creating initial broad thematic domains for data assemblage (Williams & Moser, 2019). "The first step of open coding aims at expressing data and phenomena in the form of concepts and units of meaning" (Flick, 2009, p. 307). The first part of the open coding process primarily involves "fracturing," which includes taking the data apart and examining the discrete parts for

differences and similarities (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Open coding in qualitative research presents opportunities for sub-coding data. Determining what data to capture and how to display it is a critical aspect of the research design (Williams & Moser, 2019). “The result of open coding should be a list characterizing codes and categories attached to the text and supported by code notes that are produced to explain the content of the codes. These notes could be striking observations and thoughts that are relevant to the development of theory” (Flick, 2009, p. 310). By identifying similarities and asking questions, concepts that are very similar can ultimately be labelled with the same name. The concepts can then be defined in a way that adds clarity and understanding. The list of concepts generated can then be sorted into groups of similar or related phenomena, which in turn become categories. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) categories have conceptual power because they can bring together other groups of concepts or sub-categories. It is this feature that moves open coding on to axial coding.

In contrast to open coding, which focuses on identifying emergent themes, axial coding further refines, aligns, and categorizes the themes (Williams & Moser, 2019). Whereas open coding is used to break down the data and identify first-level concepts and categories, axial coding was used to denote how new connections are made between categories and sub-categories (Kendall, 1999). With the completion of open coding and transition to axial coding, collected data can be refined and categorized allowing distinct categories to be created. “Axial coding identifies relationships between open codes, for the purpose of developing core codes. Major (core) codes emerge as aggregates of the most closely interrelated (or overlapping) open codes for which supporting evidence is strong” (Strauss, 1998, p. 109). In order to achieve this organizing objective, researchers need to engage in constant analysis, cross referencing, and refining themes.

There are three refinement activities associated with axial coding that enable and advance effective content categorization. First is possessing a clear understanding of the analytic methods used in refining data and category construction. As the researcher reviews the thematic material collected through open coding, the materials must be examined in the context of inductive and deductive analysis. The process of analyzing data is dynamic, requiring the researcher to consider a multivariate field of possible influencers relative to findings (Williams and Moser, 2019). The categories that are finalized from axial coding serve as the axis point or hub in axial coding. For example, a wooden wheel metaphor is used to describe axial coding by locating key categories as the hub and subcategories to the spokes of the wheel (Glaser, & Strauss, 1967). Another description of axial coding is the “Six C’s Model.” This model encourages categorization using provided key perspectives for further organizing and categorizing data through “causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariance, and conditions” (Larossa, 2005, p.98).

Second is the constant comparison method. The constant comparison method is a data organizing and refining activity. While there are differing approaches to implementing the constant comparison method, its focus is to compare the data collected, identify emergent themes, and continually create and refine categories. Thematic comparison and analysis are central to axial coding, as the critical focus is on organizing themes into cogent and comprehensive categories. In axial coding, as well as the other coding types, the researcher must understand the function of the coding and associated analytic activities to make informed research analysis.

Third was line-by-line coding. Line-by-line coding allowed the researcher to scrutinize each textual line of the individual interviews. This approach allowed for a deep engagement with

the text and, in turn, recognize and codify nuances and discrete thematic connectivity with other themes. “Researchers do not want to impose a pre-existing framework onto the data, but rather to let new themes emerge from it. Through keeping ‘close to the data’ continuously sifting through themes, idea fragments and seemingly unrelated utterances, data categories can become thematically stabilized, defined, and differentiated” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 80). Remaining “close to the data” requires the researcher to immerse themselves in the text, explore its nuances and surrender biases. Through engaging data line-by-line, a rhythm of analysis often occurs, assisting the researcher in being methodical and focused on constructing of meaning out of the data. This process will be used until saturation is reached. Merriam (2009) described saturation as the point at which you realize no new information or insights are forthcoming. Once satisfied with the information received, this will serve as the foundation for my findings helping to understand the experiences of Black men who have graduated from a technical college.

Furthermore, the coding process was used to generate themes within the data. Overall, a theme is an extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and what it means (Saldana, 2016). Rubin and Rubin (2012) described themes as statements *qua* (in the role of) ideas presented by participants during interviews that summarize what is going on, explain what is happening, or suggest why something is done the way it is. Themes serve to bring meaning to recurring experiences during the analysis. Additionally, themeing the data is appropriate for qualitative studies that explore participants’ beliefs, constructs, identity development, and emotional experiences (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Themes can be generated directly from the participants’ own words that succinctly capture major ideas during the analysis. Finally, themeing the data is an intensive process that requires constant reflection on participant meanings and outcomes (Saldana, 2016). Based on the examination of the literature review,

conceptual framework, research questions, and interview questions, the initial codes generated themes highlighting experiences in the areas of student support, overall success, mentorship, campus involvement, faculty interaction, employment, and family support.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness intends to help establish credibility within the study. Trustworthiness is necessary to give the reader confidence in the findings that are presented by the researcher (Creswell, 1998). When I re-story the participants' stories, I also plan to share my story in addition to a narrative of their story in order to ensure that I have correctly captured their experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (1998, 2000) refer to this as "back and forthing". According to Erlandson et al. (1993), there are various ways to establish the necessary trustworthiness in a qualitative study. Trustworthiness for this study was established through the use of reflexive journaling and member checking. These strategies are consistent with what Creswell (2006) outlines for narrative studies.

Confidentiality

Within the process of data management, protecting participant's identity is vital (Creswell, 2005). Each participant was allowed to choose their own pseudonym to reinforce confidentiality and help identify themselves in the research transcriptions. To ensure anonymity, no wording of the participants' actual name, personal information, or contact information such as e-mail, phone numbers, or any other identifying information was used in the study's writings. Participants were informed that data collected is subject to publication. All information, including data collected, would be subject to inspection by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Georgia to ensure student protection from public disclosure.

Member Checking

Within qualitative research the researcher is often the data collector as well as the data analyst, which lends itself to the potential for research bias (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Qualitative researchers might impose their personal beliefs on various stages of the research process, leading to the researcher's voice dominating the conversation (Mason, 2002). However, the potential for bias can be minimized by engaging the research participant in checking and confirming the results. The process of returning analyzed data to a participant is known as member checking or participant validation (Birt, Campbell, Cavers, Scott, & Walter, 2016). Member checking is defined within qualitative research as a quality control process by which a researcher seeks to improve the accuracy, credibility, and validity of what has been recorded during a research interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking is also known as participant verification (Rager, 2005), informant feedback, respondent validation, applicability, external validity, and fittingness (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002).

Additionally, member checking is used to validate, verify, or assess the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Doyle, 2007). During the interview, the researcher restated or summarized information and then questioned the participants to determine accuracy. The participants could either agree or disagree that the summaries reflect their views, feelings, and experiences, and if accuracy and completeness are affirmed, then the study is said to have credibility (Creswell 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba also believed that another kind of member checking occurs near the end of the research project when the analyzed data and report are given to the participants to review for authenticity of the work. The participants check to see whether a "true" or authentic representation was made of what he or she conveyed during the interview. Member checks may involve sharing all the findings with the participants and

allowing them to critically analyze the findings and comment on them (Creswell, 2007).

Participants in this study were allowed to review their transcripts verbatim and can see their spoken language in written form. This will allow me to confirm with the participant that the information obtained does in fact reflect their own perceptions and that it has been properly quoted and summarized. This method can also assist the researcher in making sure the interview transcription is in fact accurate.

As much as member checking may result in positive experiences, it is also important to highlight various disadvantages. An initial concern is that member checking relies on the assumption that there is truth that can be accounted for by a researcher and can be confirmed by a respondent, which may not be true (Barbour, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A second limitation is often the possibility of recalling painful memories for research purposes that may lead to emotional turmoil (Grinyer, 2004). Reading personal statements, and those made by other participants could result in negative emotions which may cause a reliving of the experience. Seeing the information in print form often adds to the reality of the experience. This could also trigger overwhelming feelings which may cause more harm than ensuring accurate information is obtained (Harper & Cole, 2012). Ultimately, the greatest benefit of conducting member checks is that it allows the researcher the opportunity to verify the accuracy and completeness of the findings which then helps to improve the validity of the study (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Reflexive Journal

The reflexive journal served as a record of the study to provide information about the researcher's decisions during the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflective journaling can be described as the private reflections of the researcher about any part of the research process including insight that may occur throughout data analysis (Cruz & Tantia, 2017). This will give

me the opportunity to highlight my experiences as a researcher and a participant. Lincoln and Guba (1993) also state the reflexive journal can be used as a tool to confirm or verify the research process and the decision within the process. The journal was used primarily to record pertinent information about the study; however, it will also be used to chronicle the researcher's thoughts as recommended by Hendricks (2009). Also, the researcher will also share information on conducting the individual interviews as suggested by Hendricks (2009). The journal was kept from the start of the study through completion. It will contain information about the challenges and success of the study. The journal also collected information about the themes that emerge during data analysis. According to Erlandson et al. (1993), the reflexive journal supports the study's credibility and is part of the audit trail.

Reflexive journaling can help to develop strategic and carefully considered ways to address challenges. Researchers often use techniques during in-depth interviews to prompt detailed answers from participants (Rowley, 2012). By reflecting on which techniques were most effective, novice researchers can build a “toolbox” of approaches to use in future interviews. Reflexive practice can also uncover ineffective or poorly applied techniques.

Role of Researcher & Subjectivity Statement

Researchers must remain objective in their research, and not doing so challenges their credibility within academia. The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument when data is collected (Merriam, 2001). Gupta (2011) stated, “Researchers should be objective and show objective professionalism” (p. 71). He defined this as an “outlook free of prejudice, feeling, or subjectivity (p. 71). It is the researcher’s job to present the findings allowing policymakers to view the information, analyze the results, and make decisions not based on the bias of the researcher.

Throughout the interview process, I reflected on my experiences as a Black male technical college graduate. Furthermore, qualitative research is relational and requires a certain level of intimate collaboration with the participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). What is essential in this type of research methodology is “the ability to be open, honest, authentic, and deeply interested in the participants' experience, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 59). As researcher, my responsibility is to re-story in a way that gives voices to the participants by accurately depicting their stories. The stories they tell are not summaries about distant events; they are lived stories told as they were experienced. I, as a researcher, and through my experiences as a student can be seen as part of the storied landscapes.

Therefore, researcher bias can be an issue of my reflexive stance. It is imperative to remain constantly aware of my experiences as a Black male technical college graduate and how they impact my view of the participants and how I connect their stories. Clandinin (2013) refers to this as the “personal justifications” of the inquiry. It is an intentional effort by the researcher to stay alert to what impacts their perceptions and analysis. Husserl (1977) states the researcher should not impose meanings for the learners because they are the absolute source of sharing their experiences. Ultimately, the researcher must be aware of their own experiences to avoid misinterpretations or bias of the participant’s responses. When engaging in interviews and data analysis, Creswell (2005) and Moustakas (1995) both assert that the researcher’s influence from the point of introduction to the participants, their environment, and responses can encompass the researcher’s biases through bracketing. Preconceived judgments and the researcher’s experiences can be bracketed to keep a balance between subjectivity and objectivity (Moustakas, 1995).

Limitations

All research designs have limitations. Limits to resources, complexities, and elements beyond the researcher's control will constrain research (Patton, 2015). According to Mitchell, Wirt, and Marshall (1986), educational research limitations define restrictions that could hinder conclusions drawn from a study. Qualitative research is often criticized as biased, small scale, anecdotal, and lacking rigor; however, when carried out properly, it is unbiased, valid, reliable, and rigorous (Anderson, 2010). Anderson (2010) also noted several other limitations. First, the research quality is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher and can be easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases. Interviews provide only information filtered through the views of the interviewers (i.e., the researcher summarizes the participants' views in the research report) (Creswell & Gutterman, 2019).

Secondly, the volume of data gathered can often make the analysis and subsequent interpretation are very time consuming which often results in smaller sample sizes (Merriam, 2002). In addition to the time needed for the actual interview, data is typically transcribed, with the potential of producing an element of error. Finally, concerning interviews, some disadvantages or limitations are that interview data may be misleading and only provide the viewpoint that the interviewee wants the researcher to hear. Another disadvantage is that the researcher's presence during data collection while unavoidable, can also cause the interviewee to respond in a certain way.

Furthermore, I depended on the participants' full cooperation and willingness to participate to obtain significant data to meet the needs of the research, address the research questions, and finally to gain a full understanding of their educational experiences. Furthermore, the results may not be generalizable to all technical colleges. There is a small sample size

associated with the exploration of the participants' perceptions and responses. The study will only involve interviewing eight Black men who have graduated from a technical college in Georgia, which may limit the assessment of a larger amount of data.

Summary

Chapter Three shares insight into the research design that will be employed for this study. It includes a thorough explanation of the research questions, the rationale for qualitative interview design, data collection and analysis strategies, prospective participants, and limitations of the study. The study aims to provide enhanced clarity to better understand the experiences of Black men who have graduated from a technical college. The following chapter consists of profiles from each participant that provide an intimate look into to their lived experiences as Black men who have graduated from technical colleges.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The purpose of this study was to understand and share the experiences of Black men who have graduated from a technical college and to examine their perspectives about influences on their success. Creating the opportunity for Black men to share insights about their educational accomplishments has the capacity to strengthen their resolve and confidence within other areas of their life. Also, understanding these experiences can help higher education decision-makers enact policies and processes that will enable Black men who are technical college students to succeed. Improvements in degree completion rates for Black men have positive implications for a better quality of life for this population and the potential for greater contributions to the socioeconomic prosperity in our communities. This study was guided by three overarching research questions:

1. Why do Black men decide to attend a two-year technical college?
2. How do Black men describe their overall college experience?
3. What forces or factors do Black men who have graduated from a technical college credit for their success?
 - (a) What internal or familial forces were most beneficial to college experience?
 - (b) What institutional or external forces were most beneficial to their college experience?

Profiles

Interviewing eight Black men who have graduated from technical colleges throughout the state of Georgia revealed similarities as well as unique individual characteristics that highlighted their experience. Each participant overcame multiple obstacles, but with a strong sense of motivation they were determined to graduate from college and be successful in their field of employment. Furthermore, I also felt it was important to highlight my own experience as a Black man that has graduated from a technical college. Sharing my personal story as a participant provided an opportunity to reflect on shared experiences. Shared group experiences and membership often provides a level of trust and openness with participants that may not have been present otherwise. This level of commonality affords access into groups that might otherwise be closed to outsiders (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Therefore, participants are more open that allow for greater depth in the data gathered (Adler & Adler, 1987).

Demographic information (see Table 2) and profiles are provided to describe each participant. Eight participants ranged in age from 22 – 56 years old. They graduated from various technical colleges in the state of Georgia from the spring of 2012 through the summer of 2020.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Program of Study	Graduation Date
Trey	22	Human Resources Management	Summer 2020
Michael	28	Business Management	Spring 2019
Bill	38	HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) Technology	Summer 2010
Derrick	28	Accounting	Spring 2017
Craig	41	Medical Assisting	Spring 2012
		Business Administrative Technology	Spring 2014
Larry	24	Radiologic Technology	Fall 2018
Fitzgerald	56	Computer Information Systems / Networking	Spring 2013
Alvie	35	Funeral Service Education	Spring 2012

Trey

Trey graduated from a south Georgia high school in 2017. He didn't begin pursuing a technical college degree until 2018. Trey recalls being active in high school by playing sports and being a member of several organizations. Trey had a 3.0 high school GPA but had below average SAT/ACT scores which impacted his ability to enroll in traditional colleges and universities. I could sense that at one-point Trey's journey may not have included attending college. However, he was still personally motivated to attend. He remembered,

I ended up at a two-year technical college in west-central Georgia by accident, it wasn't intentional. I had my eyes squarely set on attending an HBCU and specifically Tennessee State University, but my mom, she was like how will you pay for it? How will you get back and forth to class? As I think more about it, my mom didn't want me to go to college at all. She wanted me to go straight into the military. My dad was persuasive by telling her to let me give it a chance and see where it takes me.

Trey shared that his dad was a voice of encouragement, as his mother's questions and concerns weighed on him heavily. He described feeling a sense of numbness as if he were inadequate when it came to attending college. Trey ended up attending a technical college close to home. He focused heavily on the trades and started earning credentials such as various certificates in order to get a job and to start making money early in his college career. He highlighted the importance of being able to support himself financially.

I'm from poverty and needed money to support myself. I had mixed emotions about attending technical college, however the institution gave me everything I needed in order to be successful. I loved that school and I give them more credit than my high school or any

other school I went to. They charge \$100 per credit hour and I'm big on budgeting my tuition.

Trey appreciated attending a smaller college and felt as if they truly cared about his experience. "I was in special education coming up, so I was behind the curve on reading and comprehending which played a part in why my test scores were so low", stated Trey. Being in smaller class sizes afforded him the opportunity to get the attention needed and he started excelling. He remembered earning As and Bs every semester and had a good GPA that was above 3.0. His instructors were great when it came to explaining concepts to him in a simple way and he was able to quickly grasp those concepts in the classroom environment.

Trey appreciated having a supportive college environment which was made possible by the constant support of men who served as mentors. He remembers first arriving at college and feeling as if nobody understood him, black or white. He felt as if there lived experiences were so different that they couldn't connect in a meaningful way. He expressed being angry at times and felt as if the system was very lopsided. Stepping on that campus as a Black man, he felt as if no one understood him at first. Nevertheless, he recalls his experience meeting several men who changed that narrative and had an impact on his college experience.

I remember meeting Mr. Wilson first. I can't forget him because he helped me and he was a Caucasian dude too. He put me on reading more. Then, I met Mr. Hart and Mr. Sam who were more like friends. Mr. Sam took me under his wing teaching me different things about the trades. Seeing Mr. Hart as a Black man had a tremendous impact. It made me look at things in a broader spectrum because he was in a position where he dressed in a collared shirt and dressed nice. Technical college changed my life and I

wonder why nobody mentions going to a two-year technical college to somebody who's in poverty.

These men provided a positive influence for Trey. They provided a level of motivation that was essential to his persistence while enrolled in college. They were able to bond over academics, but also extracurricular activities such as sports and community service. Trey credits them with improving his perception of the campus climate through their mentorship and encouragement.

The importance of being involved in campus activities and organizations also impacted Trey's college experience. Trey participated in SGA, National Technical Honors Society, and was heavily involved with various community service projects. He credits this participation with expanding his view on how numerous the opportunities are when it comes to technical college. He cherished the opportunity to compete in projects throughout the state of Georgia and the United States.

I loved participating in Phi Beta Lambda (PBL). We would go to state. We would go to nationals; we would go to Baltimore and Texas and we would compete at nationals. Kids from Texas, Baltimore, and California all going to technical schools. Then I joined SGA with some of the same people. This group was focused more on leadership and learning along with how to take on manager roles and how we should carry ourselves in order to be professional. Then there was the National Technical Honors Society, which was about having good grades, so all these opportunities built up a lot of connections and confidence.

Michael

Michael graduated from a technical college in north-east Georgia in May of 2019 with a degree in business management. He currently works for a brewing company. Michael's journey highlighted the importance of how attending a technical college was essential for him to have a career, the role of mentorship, and the importance of campus involvement. When it came to attending college. Michael remembered,

My dad and my assistant principal from high school started the college thing in my head. They took us on college tours to get us in the mindset of being Black men who could go to college, and there was no excuse. As Black men, academics and education are not always our favorite. Sports is probably our favorite because that's what they have always told you is the only way you can get into college. I felt like getting into college as a Black man was not as easy as others. If you don't play sports or have scholarships, it can be tough because of the money issues

Even as he faced challenges and felt as if the initial process of getting into college was hard, he enjoyed the overall experience. Michael reflected on his reasons for deciding to attend a technical college. He started at a traditional university in north Georgia, but quickly realized that he needed more attention academically and that led him to transfer to a two-year technical college. Michael recalls the transition being very smooth and the climate was completely different. "The classes were smaller. My instructors were able to help me one-on-one, things like that. At the university, you got like 30-50 students in the class and it's kind of hard to even, you know, contact the professor. With smaller class sizes, I didn't feel like an outcast," is how Michael described the transition.

I could sense that it was important for Michael to receive the academic attention and hands-on experience necessary to be successful. Tutoring helped Michael tremendously with classes such as accounting, and he was able to bring his grades up. We all think about the factors that contributed to our success when we were enrolled in college. Being able to see Black men in a positive image was a driving force behind Michael's decision to not only continue his education but to strive to be engaged and to do well academically.

It was the people, it was the professionals, and it was also the students. When I stepped on campus, I saw Black men like me who wanted to do something in life and be something. I remember seeing my business teacher Mr. Charlie and seeing a Black man in that leadership role really gave me confidence and made me feel comfortable going to school.

Michael was very appreciative of the opportunities that he was given while attending technical college and thought he could accomplish anything. He was also motivated by the students and witnessing multiple generations within the same family working to earn their degree. For example, watching moms and daughters attending together was incredibly motivating and led him to believe that he could accomplish anything.

Being engaged with various student organizations while enrolled was also an essential part of Michael's lived experience. Business networking organizations such as Phi Beta Lambda (PBL) allowed him to connect and network with people from other colleges. Also having a Black man, Mr. Charlie, as the advisor was significant. Mr. Charlie pushed Michael to grow by placing him in multiple uncomfortable situations which improved his business skills. He learned the importance of dressing professionally and how to prepare for a job interview. At one point, Michael was strongly considering leaving school due to the academic pressure he was facing.

However, since several of his advisors were Black men, he did not want to let them down, because then he would be letting himself down. PBL gave him the confidence to compete in events against other colleges and to stay in school to earn his degree. Michael was one of the first members in his family to earn a college degree and this was a proud accomplishment.

Bill

Bill graduated from a technical college in the middle Georgia area in the summer of 2010 with a degree in Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC). He described himself as country boy who grew up in rural Houston County, GA. Bill reflected on his time as a younger student in middle and high school and how that motivated him to continue his education by pursuing entrepreneurship.

I'm a father, husband, son, and I'm a business owner. I'm really an entrepreneur at heart. I've been hustling since I was like in the third grade, from buying a pack of bubble gum with five sticks in it, selling them for 0.25 cents each, taking that money and then going to buy four more packs of bubble gum to sell. I didn't realize what was happening back then, but if someone would have paid attention to that, I'd probably be even further that I am now.

Before even beginning our interview, I could tell that Bill was excited to share his experience. We talked about our middle Georgia roots for a few minutes before he explained his main reasons for attending a technical college.

Well, my mom said, you either have to work or go to school and since I didn't do everything I needed to when I was in high school to prepare myself for a four-year college, tech school was my next best option. I knew a lot of people that went the college

route, and you know, that just wasn't for me at that time. We also had the HOPE Grant at that time, so financially it wasn't a strain or burden for me.

Bill was the youngest of three children. He had two older sisters that attended Georgia Southern University, and he paid attention to the financial burden that placed on his parents. He didn't want to be a burden financially and the HOPE Grant gave him confidence and the financial resources needed at that time to attend college.

When we discussed factors that contributed to his success, the overarching theme that Bill talked about was the people aspect and the importance of having diversity on campus. He appreciated the experience gained by working with people who are in various stages of life. Traditional four-year universities have students that usually range from 18-21, however while attending technical college, Bill had classmates that were 50 and even 60 years old. One of his classmates was already working full-time in the industry and he was invited to teach a class at the college. This provided assurances to Bill that one day he might be able to come back and teach.

Bill shared about his academic struggles and how he found time to balance work, life, and outside responsibilities. Like so many students, he had to work multiple jobs and hold himself accountable.

I didn't fail my first class in high school until about 9th or 10th grade because I got out of focus. Oh man that hurt. I carried that into my first semester in college and it was no problem. I was just focused on school at first, before I had to get a job while in college. I eventually worked two jobs and I had just moved out, so I was able to maintain for a while, until, I have to say you know, life. I just felt like making money, so it reached a

point where school was not important. I didn't understand and I didn't want to ask for help and there was no one to keep me accountable.

Bill had to figure out how to manage the intense stress that came from transitioning from high school to college and led to him switching majors. He started out in computer information systems and had no idea what that was. People always associated computers with money, therefore he was encouraged to study something related to computers, but there was no passion in this for him and it did not last.

As we shifted our interview to examine issues closely tied to race, I asked Bill to share and reflect on his experience as a Black man attending technical college in the middle Georgia area. Did he feel supported? Were there obstacles that got in his way? For the most part Bill had support and it was there, it was available. He had one teacher who was a Black guy. He was a pastor, minister, and he wasn't easy on Bill! Of course, that's what he needed but he believes that even as a Black man he had the support that was needed in his time and in his era. He had a specific mentor, Mr. K, who really helped his technical college experience. He changed our image by saying let's tuck in our shirts, let's call each Mr. and Ms. and he helped us establish this standard of respect in class and out of class.

Bill reflected on obstacles that may have impacted his options for employment after graduating. I could tell from our conversation that these experiences really generated raw emotions when reflecting on how he was treated and stereotyped. He thought by pursuing a degree in HVAC or industrial maintenance that it would be easy to get a job. Bill remembered meeting with managers at different places that would only hire one black person and those

maintenance jobs were highly coveted positions. There was one specific encounter that truly stood out. Bill stated,

I remember being told by an HR manager that you must be “Georgia Tech smart” to get a job in our maintenance department. I’ll never know how much that statement affected my education and job outlook. It certainly stopped me from pursuing a full-time career in industrial maintenance. Because I worked some as a regular laborer for the company, I thought that I would have a leg up. I had a chance to speak with the men who worked in the maintenance department, they were all white, some were cool guys, and none of them went to Georgia Tech.

It generated excitement for Bill to reflect on his experiences with student activities and organizations. He recalls failing an accounting class and how devastated he was to have to take the course again, but he notes how this experience introduced him to valuable organizations such as PBL.

This is when they introduced me to PBL, Phi Beta Lambda. I had the opportunity to dress up, get out of the school, and get around people. I won first place in this sales presentation contest, and I also won first place in the sports department which was a little harder, but I started seeing a different side of school that wasn’t just about being in the classroom and that program changed my life.

People saw Bill differently and he had a good reputation as a student. He enjoyed promoting technical college because of PBL and his experience with the organization. Having the opportunity to compete in several competitions and win first place boosted his confidence and helped him to persist while enrolled. Due to his experience winning in state and national

contests, Bill has become a big proponent of organizations like PBL. “Technical colleges have a lot of resources available; you just have to know that they are there.”

Derrick

Derrick graduated with an accounting degree from a college in north-east Georgia in the spring of 2018. He grew up in rural Morgan County, GA and currently works in the banking industry. Like many of the other participants, Derrick was excited to tell his story and share his positive experience with technical education. His reasons for attending a local technical college were centered on convenience, affordability, and flexibility.

The school was convenient and close to home. It was definitely affordable because I had transferred from a few different schools. I was already building up student loan debt so I kind of had to decide how to finish up, rather than just quit and still have student loan debt. The school was also recommended by someone, but I can't remember who. I decided just to give it a try and see what it's like.

From day one, Derrick felt that the campus climate was extremely positive, and that it afforded him the opportunity to get a quality education at the college compared to some of the previous schools that he transferred from. Derrick believed that the quality education was made possible by the various factors and resources available that contributed to his success. He felt supported as a Black man and felt that everyone was simply focused on trying to get in and get out. He appreciated the smaller class sizes and recalled how he was never nervous to raise his hand and participate in class. He remembers how resourceful the college was in many ways.

I would say how resourceful they were too, on campus, from tutoring, to the library, to work study and it kind of made it easy because technical school is not as big as a university so when it comes to getting those resources, for the most part, they were right

beside each other in the same building. It was always easy to ask who I can go to for help and they just point you in the right directions from there. So that made a big difference.

Derrick didn't own a laptop when he initially enrolled in college, therefore the library was an excellent resource. Spending time in the library gave him instant access to many of the tutors who worked there, and he could often ask them for help, and they would assist immediately. "As a Black man to be on campus at a technical school was somewhat comforting in an unexpected way. Because you are around different age groups, pretty much everybody got the same goal and is focused, more focused than a bigger university where younger kids are coming in," stated Derrick. He recalled having a Black male instructor, Mr. Tadman, as a mentor and he was also one of the first people he met on campus. Mr. Tadman encouraged Derrick to keep persisting in order to graduate from college. Derrick expressed feeling a tremendous amount of internal pressure to finish college. "People wanted to see me do good and to succeed", said Derrick.

Like several of the participants, Derrick reflected on his outside responsibilities and the challenges those represented while attending school. Students must often work at least part-time to have a decent quality of life and Derrick was no different. He worked multiple jobs throughout his college career.

I did work all throughout my college career. It's crazy because at one point, I did have three part-time jobs. I was a work-study on campus, I worked at JC Penny, and Kroger. I remember seven days a week I would be working somewhere, and it left little room for studying so I pretty much was a crammer. It was an advantage to have the work-study job on campus. I was able to work on assignments while right there at the school.

Derrick was also very appreciative and reflected on the support of his close family while attending school. The motivation received by his family was essential in helping him to persist. They had been involved in some type of way even from the beginning. His family was very encouraging as they witnessed each aspect of his journey. He started off in Valdosta, GA away from his family and then ended up going to Kennesaw, GA and that was another move, but they were there to help him throughout the entire process. “They didn’t know how schools work and they weren’t the most up to date, but they supported me without question,” stated Derrick. He recalls that his family was very encouraging and ready for him to graduate. It was a long process and he was ready to stop asking them for money and other financial support in order to achieve his goal. They motivated him on every level until they were able to witness him walk across that graduation stage.

The last part of our interview focused on campus activities and his involvement with various organizations. Derrick was involved with Phi Beta Lambda and recalled how the organization was critical when it came to improving his professional skills including communicating with superiors. He even honed in on his financial acumen by being elected to serve as treasurer of the organization.

I was able to serve as the treasurer and I honestly had no idea what a treasurer did, but it fit right in with my accounting major. I learned how to work in a group, handle money for that group, and keep everybody on the same page. I’m 100% glad I did it even though I didn’t know what I was doing at first.

Craig

Craig was born and raised in the Augusta, GA area and decided to pursue a career in the medical field. He graduated from a technical college in east-central Georgia with a degree in medical assisting, business administrative technology, and physician practice management.

Craig always knew that he was going to be in either law enforcement or in the medical field. As he approached the age of 30, he decided to try out the medical field, therefore he went to CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) school. Then he decided that he wanted to do a little more, and he applied for all of the medical programs because he didn't know where he wanted to be. He finally got accepted into this program called medical assistant. He had never heard much about it. He passed both preliminary exams and while he initially was not very excited about the program, he is was glad to be in enrolled in college. He recalled,

I appreciated the CNA program and decided to stay enrolled since it gave him me a chance to learn the clinical and administrative side of the medical field. When it came time to attend college, I felt as if the technical college was the best option for me. The school was always mentioned to students, and it was a big part of the local community.

Craig had several friends and family including an aunt who went to the same college that he was attended, and they all had positive experiences.

He expressed that his education certainly prepared him for his career as a physician practice manager. Craig gained invaluable experience by being able to interact with doctors, nurses, physician assistants and others in the medical profession.

Craig reflected on the factors that contributed to his success. He credited student engagement along with engaged faculty members as critical pieces that contributed to his positive experience while enrolled in college. He appreciated the school for creating a positive

campus climate by bringing together students from different programs and giving them the opportunity to network. His instructors were very supportive, and Craig described them as cheerleaders who constantly motivated him to stay on track and do well while enrolled. He was also excited that the college had a warranty to support their students by placing confidence behind their skills and abilities.

The one thing that always stood out for me was that my technical college had a warranty, so if students got out in the field and were not competent in a certain area the warranty would allow them to come back to school and get additional training. With the warranty and when you are struggling you can reach back out to the instructors and say I need to come back here and relearn this. We didn't train on this. That's the warranty they give students.

Our conversation then shifted to focus more on the challenges that came along with attending college, outside responsibilities, and the importance of support from mentors who were part of the campus community. Graduating from college was Craig's top priority. It was somewhat of a struggle for him financially since he couldn't work while enrolled. However, with the support of his mom, it was okay. His family provided him with encouragement along with financial support to help offset some of his living expenses.

Getting out of school was my priority. I just stuck with it. I knew what it was. I just wasn't giving up. It wasn't an option. I just stayed with it. Due to the nature of the medical assisting program, none of us were able to work jobs so that made it a little rough. However, with the support of my mom and stuff like that I was okay. It was different because you weren't making the money that you're normally use to and not

having a paycheck every week or two. My family was on board, everybody was on board they were like we know you can do it, so just do it.

Craig was very excited to share about his mentor, Mrs. White, who served as a mentor as well as an accountability partner. They keep in touch and Craig often reaches out to her to talk about job opportunities and how to make contacts in the industry. While he is no longer a student, their bond remains strong, and she is very encouraging. Craig feels that the faculty and staff at his college were highly supportive because they were sincere about wanting more men to enroll in the program. There were barriers and extra steps that the students had to take, and Craig felt as if some of those may have kept other Black men out of the program. There were internships, backgrounds checks, drug screening, etc. that would prevent students from enrolling or cause them to be kicked out of the program once they got in.

The final part of our conversation shifted to focus on Craig's involvement with campus activities and organizations. He was president of the student government association and recalls having the opportunity to speak with the dean about the direction of the program and upcoming changes they could facilitate to make the program better. Having the opportunity to speak with college leadership was a phenomenal opportunity and Craig felt as if his voice was heard and he could make a better program of future generations of students who would decide to enroll.

Larry

Larry graduated from a technical college in south-west Georgia in 2018 with a degree in radiologic technology and is currently enrolled in the Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) program. After graduating from high school, Larry was able to play college football for a traditional four-year university in west Georgia. However, he didn't have a full scholarship and student loans were the only option available to him. He was persistent about not having to

borrow money for school, therefore he decided to attend a technical college close to home. This also gave him the opportunity to start making money. “I transferred to a technical college so that I could go ahead and start making money versus going to school for four years and hoping to get a job when I graduate. Technical college was affordable, I could get in and out without having to take out a loan,” stated Larry.

The technical college transition was easy for Larry, coming from a four-year college. He witnessed other students struggle, but he didn’t have any challenges in that area. He remembers being 19 years old and still wanting to hang out and party with his friends. He quickly realized that he would have to better manage his time and work a part-time job in order to have money.

It was all about time management. I was doing personal training, working at TJ Maxx, going to clinicals, and still trying to keep my grades up. I was doing a lot of stuff. I was a tenth of a point away from being an honor student. I probably would have done better if I would have focused in a little more.

Larry had tremendous family support especially from his mother. She was the director of a healthcare program for a college, and she helped him navigate many aspects including study tips and simply encouraging me to just go study at times.

The next part of our conversation shifted to speak about race and how Larry felt it impacted his experience attending technical college. “I wouldn’t say that I felt pressure as a Black man going through besides, I’ve been Black my whole life. I think life itself is just different and because I’m Black, I just know what I have to do,” stated Larry. He really believed that a mistake most often made by other Black students is the assumption that they will have it easy if they are supervised or taught by other Black people. There was one specific encounter

where Larry had some feelings that race may have played a role in receiving awards from the college. Larry recalls,

I think the only time that it was kind of a problem was an award ceremony with the local hospital. They gave awards to all of the white students, none of the Black x-ray techs got an award. I really thought that I was going to get one because I am a winner, but it was a White girl that got all of them. Even though I understand what role race can play, I really didn't feel like she won the awards because she was white. I think she worked hard and deserved them or maybe they saw someone they can relate to more than me. I try not to indulge in that unless racism is right in my face.

The final part of our conversation shifted to reflect on Larry's campus involvement with various activities and organizations. He was a member of SkillsUSA and was referred to the organization by his teacher, Ms. Simmons. Larry had an awesome experience with the organization. Their group ending up going to nationals to compete and he remembered the awesome experience of being able to network with peers from across the country. "It opened my eyes to a lot. I saw a lot of different stuff and students from all 50 states. It was big and we won 3rd place on the national stage. It was really cool," stated Larry.

Fitzgerald

Fitzgerald was from rural south-west Georgia. He is 56 years old and served 20 years in the U.S. Navy before attending technical college. He graduated with a degree in computer information systems with an emphasis in networking. We began our conversation by reflecting on his decision to attend a technical college. Fitzgerald's reasons for attending mainly centered on the length of time required to complete the program. He was impressed with the possibility of finishing his degree in two years or less and then being able to immediately go to work. He also

felt that technical college would actually give him the skills needed to be work ready on day one. His background in the Navy provided him with a strong educational foundation, now he just needed the experience to support that. He recalled,

A lot of fields don't require a four-year degree, but you need the hands-on experience.

My experience in the Navy made it easy for me because the military had already given me training. Instead of being fresh out of high school and still being unsure of what you want to do, I had a specific direction I wanted to go in. It was an easier track for me.

My conversation with Fitzgerald then shifted to focus on his academic experiences and what factors contributed to his success while enrolled in college. His experience in the military placed him in many professional environments where he learned valuable professional skills including how to give effective presentations to the superiors. The military experience truly made him more comfortable in the academic setting of a classroom. Fitzgerald remembered how engaged his instructors were and how they really wanted him to succeed. They were excited for him, and this was a huge motivation. "They understood why I was there. They understand that people want to re-train so that you can stay viable in an industry that's not dying economically. They really picked up my spirits when I needed it because going back to school can be hard and if you don't do well on that first test it can be defeating," stated Fitzgerald. The faculty members were always encouraging by offering to provide that extra help. Fitzgerald was also able to get a part-time job as a lab assistant on campus and this really helped him to stay focused. He went to the library a lot and utilized the labs to do complete many of his assignments.

The next piece of our conversation focused on Fitzgerald's outside responsibilities, the challenges that were presented when working to finish college, and the various support received from faculty and staff. He recalled that college was somewhat challenging. During the first year,

he was the caregiver for his mother. He also described the need to have a part-time job to support himself financially. “It really made for some really long days. Having to work and take care of her was a challenge at times. Sometimes I had to miss a class or two just to make sure she was taken care of,” stated Fitzgerald. It was comforting to him that many of his instructors were very accommodating. He remembers one person who always kept him accountable and that was his older cousin, Michelle. She constantly motivated me to continue and always stressed the importance of finishing my degree.

I asked Fitzgerald to reflect on whether he thought his college experience as a Black man attending a technical college in south Georgia. He recalls not seeing a difference regarding race. For him and other Black men, he felt that the biggest obstacle was an economic one due to the cost of college and sometimes the lack of financial aid available to assist students.

I think the biggest hurdle is economics or financial and that’s the biggest obstacle that Black men face. I feel some may not be eligible for financial aid and now they are having to pay out of pocket and many of them are wondering where that money will come from. I was fortunate enough to use money from the V.A. I really didn’t feel any added pressure as a Black man. I felt like times had changed. This is not 1960 or even 1980. Regardless of race, color, or anything else, we are in all walks of life. We are even in NASCAR, hockey, and we are pioneers. We are getting our feet wet in a lot of new fields.

Our conversation concluded with a discussion on student activities and organization involvement. I wanted to hear from Fitzgerald about his participation in these activities and the impact it had on his college experience. The first organization that he joined was SkillsUSA and he didn’t realize what kind of magnitude the program really had. He participated and was able to

go to regionals. He recalls meeting a lot of people from different schools and it was just amazing to have the opportunity to network with students from around the state and country. It gave him the opportunity to show off his talent, regardless of what we are they were participating in. He expressed being grateful for the opportunity to practice what was learned in the classroom. He also participated in Phi Beta Lambda (PBL). He served with them and had the opportunity to organized and participate in activities such as community service and fundraiser to help the club generate revenue. These experiences showed him how organizations work and gave him a chance to meet so many people. “You were able to work as a part of a team and that experience carried over into the workplace,” stated Fitzgerald.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

Researcher Reflections

After interviewing these men and really having a chance to highlight their lived experiences, I was excited about the opportunity to share my experience as a technical college student. My interview was conducted by Dr. Janette Hill who served as a member of my dissertation committee. Sharing my story as a participant gave me the opportunity to reflect on a shared experience. Graduating from a technical college and now having the opportunity to serve as a technical college administrator has truly brought my experience full circle. I graduated from Ogeechee Technical College in 2012 with a degree in Funeral Services Education. We began our conversation reflecting on my collegiate experience and why I decided to attend a two-year technical college.

My collegiate experience began at Georgia Southern University. I graduated with both undergraduate and graduate degrees in business administration. After graduating, I worked full-time in human resources in the Statesboro and Savannah area. I enjoyed working in the field and gained some valuable experience. However, I wasn't exempt from the great recession of 2009, and it really hit me hard. I found myself unemployed, needing to make money to take care of family, and needing to do it rather quickly. Funeral services was always in blood. My parents owned a funeral home in south Georgia so I was always around the business and understood it quite well. It also made for a smooth transition since all my core classes from Georgia Southern transferred in. Therefore, the associate's degree only took me a year to complete, and I only had to take the funeral services courses. Based on the experiences of others, I was confident that

technical education would give me the skills needed to be successful. Also, the college was affordable, flexible, and the faculty were genuinely concerned about my education. Thanks to scholarships, I only paid \$500 dollars out of pocket for the entire degree.

Our conversation transitioned and Dr. Hill began to ask me about my academic experiences while enrolled at Ogeechee Technical College. It was a great experience and very eye opening.

I came in with the expectation that it would be easy given the fact that I had already graduated with a bachelor's degree from a traditional four-year university. My attitude was like this is going to be a piece of cake and I can show up when I want to, and things are just going to magically happen. I learned very quickly that I had to study hard and put in the same amount of work as everyone else.

This was not a program that was subpar, and I think I bought into that sigma a little. It was an eye opener in terms of the hours I had to spend studying especially in courses such as anatomy, pathology, microbiology and others. It also required a level of time management that was different from my time at Georgia Southern University. With work, family, and other obligations I had to be intentional in balancing my home and school life. I am glad that we had a cohort model where me and my classmates could move through courses together and lean on each other for help and support. This really helped us academically. We were able hold each other accountable. Since I had already graduated from college, I was also able to serve as a mentor in a small capacity by helping several of them navigate certain pieces of college such as registering for classes, going through the financial aid process, applying for jobs, etc. The college also had a great tutoring program which helped me tremendously in the science courses such as

anatomy and pathology. I would use these tutors almost weekly, and they were a great resource to help me navigate those courses and do well in them academically.

The next part of our interview talked about the importance of mentorship while I was enrolled and pursuing my degree, and I can honestly say that for me this was the most exciting piece of our discussion. I had an amazing mentor who I often referred to as J.B. She was a full-time instructor at the college, and she really took me under her wing helping me to navigate things academically, but also professionally by helping me to understand so much about the funeral industry.

She connected me with local funeral homes as potential employers, she connected me with professional associations, and other organizations that provide mentorship and scholarships for students. She was instrumental in helping me to understand the business side of funeral services. I wasn't new to school therefore I didn't have a hard time adjusting to the academic side, but the business side and understanding the funeral services industry was initially challenging, because it was different.

While I had grown up around the business, I only had a "50,000 foot" view of what was involved, and school challenged me to learn the inner-workings and details about the industry. J.B. was critical in this area, and I appreciated her role as a mentor. Being one of a few Black men in the program, there was a heightened sense of awareness and the pressure of always wanting to do well stuck with me. Being in the minority placed a chip on my shoulder to do well and my mentor J.B. understood that better than most. As a Black woman, she pulled me in and made sure that I had the resources needed in order to be successful. Being a Black woman in her mid to late 50s meant that she had a totally different lived experience and she realized that as a Black man that I would have to navigate some difficult situations when it came to coursework,

interacting with faculty, and knowing what resources were available. She expressed the challenges she faced as Black woman interested in owning her business and how difficult it was to get started at the beginning.

I remember those explicit conversations of what to do and what not to do if you want to avoid some roadblocks and pitfalls. There were only about three or four other Black men in my entire program so there was an added pressure on all of us to do well. For me there was a sense of extra pressure because my family owned a funeral home and were well known throughout middle and south Georgia.

My father had a good reputation in the industry, so I felt as if there was not an option when it came to doing well. I feared embarrassing my family and I ultimately wanted to make them proud. My family was very supportive, especially my father. He viewed this as a continuation of his legacy and helped me navigate the industry. He taught me the importance of the intangibles such as quality service, how to care for people, and the significance of earning respect within the industry. More than anything, he taught me that if you wake up one morning and your heart is no longer in it, then step aside. I carry that lesson with me to this day.

The next piece of our conversation shifted to focus on the challenges of managing outside responsibilities while attending college. It was certainly tough, and it took some navigating. There was the challenge of working full-time, managing my home life, staying involved with my community organizations, etc. The experience at Ogeechee Technical College was very different from my time at Georgia Southern University (GSU). When I stepped foot on the campus of GSU as a freshman, I was simply a student and didn't have the added responsibility of trying to figure out work, family, and life! I had to learn how to sharpen my time management skills rather quickly in order to not fall behind within any area of my life and I struggled.

There were nights where I wanted to quit and contemplated just waiting to finish the degree later at a time that was much more convenient. This is where my father and sister were the most supportive in helping me to finish my degree. It was also tough to open up to others about the struggles of higher education. As men, we are taught to just “suck it up” or “push through” and not complain or seek help when things become overwhelming.

I learned quickly that this would not work, and I needed the support of family, mentors, and others to help me navigate college along with the added pressure of outside responsibilities.

The final piece of our conversation focused on my involvement with campus activities and organizations and overall engagement with the campus community. Being a little older and more mature really allowed me to zero in on the type of organizations that I wanted to join. Due to time constraints, I had to be very intentional when it came to extracurricular activities. There were several organizations recommended by mentor Ms. J.B. that I joined which were truly impactful.

The first one was SkillsUSA. This organization provided scholarships, job interviewing techniques, and access to a lot of industry contacts. They really focused on sharpening skills to help students become proficient. I met people all throughout the funeral services industry. My time in SkillsUSA allowed me to meet a colleague from Valdosta, GA who introduced me to the Georgia Funeral Services Practitioner’s Association (GFSPA). This organization focused specifically on making contacts and serving funeral industry. I received a \$1,000 scholarship which was a game changer financially and gave me the resources to drastically reduce my out-of-pocket expenses.

The last organization was the student leadership council. I appreciated this organization the most because it gave me an opportunity to interact with faculty and college leadership in

order to be a voice for the student body. I was able to advocate for more scholarships, better access to student support services, and share the struggles that we faced each day as students. I remember the college president coming by multiple meetings for a question-and-answer session and this really made the students feel as if their voices were heard and we appreciated that. Being involved in these organizations provided me with the opportunity to make great connections that I still maintain to this day.

Results

Participants profiles revealed how each individual's technical college experience was unique. This information adds to the strength and transparency of the results. One primary goal of this study was to be able to provide an unfiltered account using applicable excerpts describing the participant's experiences.

Furthermore, coding was used during the data analysis process to provides me with opportunities to sift through each informant's responses and organize similar words, phrases, and thoughts. According to Merriam (2009), coding facilitates making sense of one's qualitative research study. The Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software MaxQDA was used to organize the retrieval of relevant data to develop individual narratives and the subsequent coding and categorization of themes (Kuckartz & Radiker, 2019). As I analyzed interview data, five primary themes emerged from the coding process including (a) campus climate, (b) mentorship, (c) student support services, (d) campus involvement, and (e) external factors. All five themes have categories of significance that follow (see Table 3).

Table 3

Themes/Categories of Significance

Theme				Welcoming Campus Environment
Campus Climate	Engaged Instructors	Small Class Sizes	Diverse Student Body	
Mentorship	Faculty Mentor	Family Support		
Student Support Services	Tutoring	Library Services		
Campus Involvement	Phi Beta Lambda	Skills USA		
External Factors	Employment			

Campus Climate

A general agreement exists that campus climate is a multifaceted measure of people’s attitudes about, perceptions of, and experiences within a certain environment (Glisson & James, 2002). Experiences within a campus environment are an element of climate. Decision makers need information about the complexities of their institution’s climates, i.e. the interplay among people, processes, and institutional culture to inform decision making, policies, and action (Baird, 1990). Campus climate assessment should lead to institutional change (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008). The four key themes related to campus climate are as follows (a) engaged instructors, (b) small class sizes, (c) diverse student body, and (d) welcoming campus environment.

Engaged Instructors

Several participants spoke in detail about the significance of having instructors who were engaged with them through their college experience. For example, Craig reflected on how having engaged faculty members was a critical piece that contributed to his positive experience while enrolled in college. He credited his instructors with being his top supporters. “Your instructors were always your number one supporter. They were like cheerleaders pushing you because everybody don’t comprehend the same, don’t perceive all the information the same, but they are always there.” He really appreciated the fact that the technical college had a warranty, therefore if students began working and were not competent in a certain area the warranty would allow them to come back to school and get additional training.

Fitzgerald credited faculty support as being an essential part of his college experience. He was very excited to share how motivational his instructors were. He felt that his instructors wanted him to succeed. They were excited for him, and this was a huge motivational factor when it came to finishing college. They deeply understood why he was attending college. Fitzgerald saw his experience as an opportunity to retrain to stay viable in the work industry. “My instructors really picked up my spirits when I needed it because going back to school can be hard and if you don’t do well on that first test it can be defeating, but the faculty would always offer to provide extra help.”

During the first year of college, Fitzgerald was the caregiver for his mother while also having to work a part-time job. “It really made for some long days. Having to work and take care of her was a challenge at times. He remembers missing class often to make sure that his mother was taken care of. It was comforting for him that his instructors were accommodating and allowed him to make up classes that were missed.

Trey was very appreciative of having instructors who made learning simple and difficult courses easy to understand. The support he received from faculty made achieving higher grades even more possible. Trey was earning As and Bs every semester as he maintained a GPA of 3.3 or higher. He appreciated having instructors who explained course material in a simple way as it allowed him to comprehend the material quicker.

Small Class Sizes

Derrick felt as if the smaller class sizes were a factor that reduced his anxiety while enrolled at a technical college. He appreciated the smaller class sizes, and he was never nervous to raise his hand and ask questions regarding material that he did not understand. He felt that the campus was very resourceful providing services such as tutoring, library services, and work study opportunities. It was easy to navigate because technical school was not as big as the university so when it came to getting those resources, they were very accessible. It was always easy to ask for help and that had a positive impact on my experience.

Michael started college attending a traditional four-year university in north Georgia but transferred to a technical college and was amazed by the intimacy and closeness of students in the class. He transferred because he felt like he needed a little more attention academically. It was a smooth transition, and he was able to make a connection. “The classes were smaller. My instructors were able to help me one-on-one, things like that. At the university, you got like 30-50 students in the class and it’s kind of hard to even, you know, contact the professor. Since classes were smaller, I didn’t feel like an outcast.”

Trey appreciated being in smaller classes and he was able to get the support that he needed to be successful academically. While attending a smaller school he felt as if they cared, and it was not as intimidating as a big university with 30,000 students. He was able to receive the

right amount of attention from his instructors and they created a successful environment for learning. Trey recalled,

I was in special education throughout middle and high school, so I was behind the curve on reading and comprehending which played a part in why my test scores were so low.

The smaller classes allowed me to get the attention needed and I starting excelling, I was knocking out the grades As and Bs every semester and had a good GPA, so it felt like family and felt good during the entire time I was there.

Diverse Student Body

Bill, Michael, and Derrick all reflected on the importance of the people aspect and the positive impact of having diversity among their classmates while enrolled in college. These men were able to interact with people from all walks of life and with various life experiences. With a traditional college, most classmates are 18, 19, 20, but at technical college, classmates can be 50 years old, 35 years old, and even 60 years old. We were able to interact with people that's already in the workforce. "One of my classmates was already working in air conditioning industry and they invited him to teach," stated Bill.

Michael expressed excitement when reflecting on seeing the diversity in the student body. "It was also the students, seeing whole families out there! It wasn't the same age group that I'm seeing every semester, its's like moms and daughters attending together and that was motivation for me to continue and finish," stated Michael.

Derrick also felt supported as a Black man attending a technical college and was comforted by the diversity in the student population. For him, being on campus at a technical college was comforting in an unexpected way. Everyone seemed to be focused and had the same goal of graduating and going to work in order to make a better life for themselves.

Welcoming Campus Environment

Five participants expressed being in a supportive campus environment as Black men attending technical colleges. “I had support, for the most part it was there”, stated Bill. “I had the support that I needed so I just had to get it done.” Derrick felt supported and encouraged as a Black man and shared the level of comfort he felt by just being on campus. People wanted him to succeed and that gave him a huge confidence boost. Craig was very aware of the limited number of Black men in his academic program and noted how the faculty were overly supportive of him, because they wanted to recruit in more Black men and Craig’s success could help those efforts.

Larry was very candid when reflecting on the campus environment and how race impacted his experience as a student. He never felt different because of his race. “I’ve been Black my whole life. I think life itself is just different and because I’m Black, I just know what I have to do,” expressed Larry. Larry noted that one mistake that a lot of Black people make is thinking that having superiors who are Black is supposed to get them some leeway.

Fitzgerald felt as if the campus climate was positive, and he really didn’t see a difference in his experiences that were solely tied to his race. He felt as if the economics or financial aid aspect was the biggest obstacle that Black men face. I felt that many of my peers were not eligible for financial aid and had to pay out of pocket which often left many of them wondering where that money will come from. Fitzgerald was fortunate enough to use money from his veteran’s tuition assistance to pay for school which reduced the pressures of the financial burden.

Mentorship

Mentors are critical to the success of Black men in postsecondary education. Mentors on campus act as powerful agents that help to encourage Black male campus engagement (Harper, 2012). For example, Scott (2012) highlighted the importance of mentors on campus, suggesting

that they can serve to create a welcoming and affirming campus climate. Specifically, he noticed that mentors can be responsible for (a) acclimating students to the campus environment, (b) informing students about campus involvement, (c) serving as guides as students continue throughout college. Mentors can also serve as safety nets helping students to make good decisions. Highly individualized, the theme mentorship played a very important role in the lived experiences of the men who participated in this study.

Faculty Mentor

Trey appreciated having a supportive college environment which was made possible by the constant support of men that worked at the college and served as mentors. He remembered meeting Mr. Wilson first. “I can’t forget him because he helped me, and he was a Caucasian dude too. He put me on reading more,” stated Trey. He also developed a positive relationship with Mr. Hart and Mr. Sam who were more like friends and became role models. They both taught him some much about the industrial and trades industries. Seeing Mr. Hart as a Black man had a tremendous impact on his experience. He was a professional who dressed in suits and wore business attire. This created a culture of professional for me as a student and I was ready to dress professionally in order to create a positive image of myself on campus and within the community.

Michael reflected on the importance of seeing and connecting with Black men on campus and how that had a positive impact on his overall experience. I remember seeing my business teacher Mr. Charlie and seeing a Black man in that leadership role really gave him confidence and made him feel comfortable going to school. As a mentor, he showed me amazing opportunities, and what could come out of what I was trying to accomplish as a student. He put me in different and uncomfortable situations to help me grow to be the businessperson that I

needed to be by dressing well and learning how to approach an interview. At one point Michael wanted to leave school, but so many of his advisors were Black men and he didn't want to let them down, because then he would be letting himself down.

Bill's reflection on the importance of having a mentor was very vivid. His mentors challenged him to do well and work hard. He remembers one mentor who was a Black man named Mr. K. He was a pastor and he really motivated Bill. Mr. K made them reflect on the importance of professionalism by asking them to tuck in their shirts, to call each other Mr. and Ms., and he helped them to establish this standard of respect in class and out of class.

Craig's mentor helped him navigate school and she continues to remain as a mentor even though he has graduated and moved on from college. Craig's mentor was Mrs. White was very influential as it relates to his college experience. "I was president of the medical assisting club, and she was the advisor. She was a great mentor who helped me navigate the challenges of school," said Craig. Craig still talks to her to this day. She is a great resource when it comes to job changes, student placement, and other things. She is still very encouraging.

As I reflected on my personal college experience, mentorship was invaluable. It made the difference in providing me with the confidence and support needed to navigate college and ultimately finish. I had an amazing mentor who I often referred to as J.B. She was a full-time instructor at the college, and she really took me under her wing helping me to navigate things academically, but also professionally by helping me to understand so much about the funeral industry. She connected me with local funeral homes as potential employers, she connected me with professional associations, and other organizations that provide mentorship and scholarships for students. She was instrumental in helping me to understand the business side of funeral services.

I was not new to school therefore I didn't have a hard time adjusting to the academic side, but the business side and understanding the funeral services industry was initially challenging, because it was different. While I had grown up around the business, I only had a "50,000 foot" view of what was involved, and school challenged me to learn the inner-workings and details about the industry. J.B. was critical in this area, and I appreciated her role as a mentor.

Family Support

When issues arose for these students, turning to family members they trust was usually the first response. Ultimately, family involvement throughout the student's life and constant support during higher education increases the chances of persistence, while strengthening the student's resolve to help others in the community (Sledge, 2012). The participants in this study received varying levels of family support.

Derrick was very appreciative and reflected on the support of his close family while attending school. My family was very encouraging and witnessed my entire college journey.

I started off in Valdosta, GA away from my family and then I ended up going to Kennesaw, GA and that was another move, but they were there to help me throughout the process. They didn't know how schools work and they weren't the most up to date.

My family was very encouraging and ready for me to graduate. It was a long process for Derrick, but he felt like he had put his family through so much. They motivated him and he was able to graduate. I declared it and just stuck through it.

Larry credits his family support, especially that of his mother, as being critical to his success while enrolled in college. His mom was extremely supportive. She was the director of a healthcare program for a technical college, so she helped him navigate many aspects including study tips and how to prepare academically for his courses and lab assignments.

Craig remembered the impact of not being able to work while enrolled in the medical assisting program, and without the support of his family he would not have survived school. Due to the nature of the medical assisting program, none of the students were able to work therefore it was a struggle financially. However, with the support of his mom and other family member the financial burden was somewhat relieved. “It was different because you wasn’t making money that you’re normally use to, not having a paycheck every week or two. My family was on board, everybody was on board they were like we know you can do it, so just do it,” stated Craig.

Fitzgerald also highlighted the support he received from his family and how that inspired him to continue. He had one person that was really concerned about making sure that he finished. His older cousin Michelle was always there in the struggle with him. It was her motivation that gave him the courage to continue, and she constantly stressed the importance of finishing my degree.

As I reflect on my own experience with technical education, my family was supportive, especially my father. His advice and counsel were priceless. My father viewed my work in the funeral industry as a continuation of his legacy and helped me navigate the industry. He taught me the importance of the “intangibles” such as quality service, how to care for people, and the significance of earning respect within the industry. More than anything, he taught me that if you wake up one morning and your heart is no longer in it, then step aside. I carry that lesson with me to this day.

Student Support Services

Increased attention is being given to the services, functions, and outcomes of two-year postsecondary institutions such as community and technical colleges, particularly as they affect student persistence and completion. These institutions remain central to conversations swirling

within the higher education and policy communities around “student success.” One strategy for increasing student persistence and achievement outcomes lies in the area of student support services. These types of services are a standard feature at most higher education institutions (Cooper, 2010). Research does suggest that student support services play a role in promoting successful outcomes for community college students. These services can be unique to a specific college. However, they most often include services such as library support, tutoring, academic advising, financial guidance, and career development. Participants within this study identified the use of tutoring and library support as an essential part of their lived experience when enrolled.

Tutoring and Library Services

Michael reflected on his academic experience and shared how important it was to have tutors who could explain and help him grasp material in his courses. “Tutoring helped me a lot with my accounting class, it brought my grades up. Since classes were smaller, I didn’t feel like an outcast.”

Derrick also highlighted the importance of tutoring, library services, and other resources that were helpful to him while enrolled. He appreciated the smaller class sizes, and he was never nervous to raise his hand. He also appreciated the services provided by the faculty and staff on campus, from tutoring to the library, to work study. The technical school was not as big as a university so when it comes to getting those resources, they were readily available. It was always easy to ask for help and that made a big difference.

I didn’t have a laptop during school, so the library was there for me 100%. I ended up getting a desktop computer later in my career. Hanging out in the library I did see tutors walking by and could often ask them whatever, right on the spot and these resources

made a difference academically. I watched my grades improve each semester as I got more comfortable.

While I was enrolled at Ogeechee Technical College, I remembered how extremely beneficial it was for me as well to have access to tutors to help me in the science courses. The college also had a great tutoring program which helped me tremendously in the science courses such as anatomy and pathology. I would use these tutors almost weekly, and they were a great resource to help me navigate those courses and do well in them academically.

Fitzgerald also noted how important it was to have access to a library and lab space to have a quiet place to complete my work. “I went to the library a lot and I utilized the labs to do my work. I understood early on that you have to do your work to be successful” stated Fitzgerald.

Campus Involvement

The impact of student involvement on student development is apparent in areas such as leadership, job placement potential, and students' persistence in completing the college degree (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Involvement can affect a student on many different levels and in many ways. Involvement in college substantially increases development in areas which are highly regarded in terms of the skills needed in for life after college (Nash, Rosson, & Schoemer, 1973). In addition, student involvement enhances self-confidence as well as interpersonal and leadership skills (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The participants in this study were involved with various organizations and they credit them as being essential to their college experience. The common themes generated were organizations such as Skills USA, Phi Beta Lambda, and Student Leadership Council.

Phi Beta Lambda

Future Business Leaders of America – Phi Beta Lambda, Inc. (FBLA-PBL) is the largest business organization in the world for career and technical education. Each year, PBL helps over 230,000 members prepare for careers in business (Reese, 2008). Several of the participants in this study shared their experience with PBL and how it provided them with unique opportunities and sharpened their skill set.

Michael's excitement truly came to light when he reflected on his involvement with campus organizations such as Phi Beta Lambda (PBL). "I was heavily involved in PBL and as a business organization I had the opportunity to network with other people from other colleges. Also having a Black man, Mr. Charlie, as the advisor was exceptional. He placed me into different and uncomfortable situations which allowed me to grow. I was able to become a successful businessperson. I learned the importance of dressing well along with how to prepare for a job interview."

"At one point I wanted to leave school, but so many of my advisors were Black men so I didn't want to let them down, because then I would let myself down," stated Michael. PBL gave him the confidence to compete in events against other colleges, to stay in school and get my degree. Most importantly for me, I was one of the first in my family to graduate from college and this was a big accomplishment for my entire family.

Bill noted how his involvement with PBL helped him academically.

I failed an accounting class and had to take the class again. This is when they introduced me to PBL, Phi Beta Lambda. Being able to dress up, get out of the school, and get around people. I won first place in this sales presentation contest, and I also won first place in the sports department which was a little harder, but I started seeing a different

side of school that wasn't just about being in the classroom and that program changed my life.

Furthermore, people began to see Bill differently and he had a good reputation.

Whenever he promotes technical school, he promote PBL because he won first place in both and state and national competitions. Bill wants people to know that there are a lot of good resources available at technical colleges, you just have to connect with the right people.

Derrick highlighted how his involvement in PBL sharpened his skills all-around and make him more comfortable on campus. PBL had a good professional environment. It sharpened his professional skills. It helped him become more comfortable when it came to giving business presentations to various groups. He was able to serve as the treasurer and honestly, he had no idea what a treasurer did, but it fit right in with his accounting major. He learned how to work in a group, handle money for that group, and keep everybody on the same page. "I'm 100% glad I did it even though I didn't know what I was doing at first," stated Derrick.

Fitzgerald also credited the importance of being involved in organizations such as PBL as a critical part of his college success. The organization provided a skill set that supported what he was learning in the classroom. He was able to participate in and organize a lot of fundraisers. These experiences showed me a lot about how organizations work and gave me a chance to meet so many people. You were able to work as part of a team and that carried over into the workplace.

SkillsUSA

SkillsUSA is a national nonprofit education association serving middle-school, high-school, and college/postsecondary students preparing for careers in trade, technical, and skilled service occupations. The organization serves more than 375,000 students annually. The

SkillsUSA framework focuses on personal, workplace, and technical skills grounded in academics. SkillsUSA is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Labor as a successful model of employer-driven workforce development.

Larry recalls his experience with SkillsUSA quite vividly, noting the major influence his instructor had on him when decided to participate. He was involved with SkillsUSA based on the advice of his teacher Ms. Simmons. We ended up competing as nationals and we did win first place in the medical contest. It was very beneficial and opened his eyes to so many resources. He was able to network with students and employers for all 50 states.

Reflecting on my experience, SkillsUSA also played a big role in my career as a student enrolled at Ogeechee Technical College. It gave me a chance to network and put my skills to the test. The organization was recommended by mentor Ms. J.B. The organization provided scholarships, job interviewing techniques, and access to a lot of industry contacts. They really focused on sharpening skills to help students become proficient. I met people all throughout the funeral services industry. My time in SkillsUSA allowed me to meet a colleague from Valdosta, GA who introduced me to the Georgia Funeral Services Practitioner's Association (GFSPA). This organization focused specifically on making contacts and serving funeral industry.

Fitzgerald shared his experiences with SkillsUSA. He admits that initially he didn't realize what kind of magnitude the program really had on his experience. He participated in many competitions and was able to go to regionals. "I met a lot of people from different schools, and it was just amazing. It gave us the opportunity to show off our talent, regardless of what we were participating in. I was able to practice what I learned in the classroom," stated Fitzgerald.

External Factors

Students of all backgrounds and ages face external pressures during the course of their college education. Successful students have or seek out a support system to face challenges that are often related to employment, school, and family responsibilities. Most of the participants in this study shared that they worked one or more jobs while enrolled in college while attending school full-time. Others had the added responsibility of caring for and supporting family members. The major sub-theme that emerged from this study included focused on the participants being employed while enrolled in college.

Employment

Almost every participant worked at least part-time while enrolled in college, and some worked multiple jobs while enrolled. Several participants balanced work and school responsibilities by obtaining jobs on campus, either as part-time employees or student workers. This helped them meet financial demands, while also affording the opportunity to learn job skills.

Bill shared about his academic struggles and how he managed to balance work, life, and outside responsibilities. Like many students, he had to work multiple jobs and figure out how to hold himself accountable. At first, he was just focused on attending college. Eventually he worked two jobs to help support himself financially. "I just felt like making money, so it reached a point where school was not important," stated Bill. He understood that college was very different from high school and there was no one to wake him up, make him go to class, or keep hold him accountable. For him, the stress that came along with college was very different.

One of the most interesting conversations was with Derrick as he reflected on his outside responsibilities and the challenges those represented while attending school. He worked all

throughout his college career. “It’s crazy because at one point, I did have three part-time jobs. I was a work-study on campus, I worked at JC Penny, and Kroger. I remember seven days a week I would be working somewhere,” stated Derrick. This left him very little time for studying and he found himself cramming a lot. Having the work-study job on campus was an advantage for Derrick. He was able to work on assignments and study while working on campus.

Larry stressed the importance of having to work, but also expressed how it helped him to develop his time management skills by having to balance so many competing priorities. He remembered being 19 years old and still trying to hang out and party with my friends. Larry quickly learned that he had to work to have money. It was all about time management for him. He was doing personal training, working at TJ Maxx, going to clinicals, and still trying to keep his grades up. He was a tenth of a point away from being an honor student and felt that he would have done better if he would have focused more on his academics.

Fitzgerald shared how his external responsibilities also impacted his performance on the academic side. He remembers college being a challenge. During the first year, he was the caregiver for his mother, and he also had a part-time job. It really made for some long days. Having to work and take care of her was a challenge at times. He often had to miss a class or two just to make sure she was taken care of, and this required him to balance work, school, and home life.

As I reflected on my own experience, college was certainly challenging and managing multiple priorities was certainly not easy. There were days when I wanted to just rollover and quit. It was stressful to think about continuing. It was certainly tough, and it took some navigating. There was the challenge of working full-time, managing my home life, staying involved with my community organizations, etc. The experience at Ogeechee Technical College

was very different from my time at Georgia Southern University (GSU). When I stepped foot on the campus of GSU as a freshman, I was simply a student and didn't have the added responsibility of trying to figure out working a full-time job, family, and life! I had to learn how to sharpen my time management skills rather quickly to not fall behind within any area of my life and I struggled. There were nights where I wanted to quit and contemplated just waiting to finish the degree later at a time that was much more convenient. However, the resources that surrounded me provided a level of support that was encouraging. It created a sense of motivation to complete this degree.

Conclusion

After participant profiles were revealed, exploration of their data led to the emergence of five themes that included campus climate, mentorship, student support services, campus involvement, and external factors. I shared how these students made meaning of their lived experiences. Their stories were shared through narratives driven by their responses from the semi-structured interview instrument. I am optimistic that the readers will be able to place themselves in the participants' shoes to gain more insight on their experience. The overarching themes are essential when connecting readers to the commonalities most prominent among the participants.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of Black men who had graduated from a technical college. The eight research participants in this study graduated from technical colleges throughout the state of Georgia. Furthermore, it was also important to highlight my own experience as Black man that has also graduated from a technical college. Sharing my story as a participant gave me the opportunity to reflect on a shared experience. The findings reflect the stories of eight college graduates, including the researcher, and highlights our college experiences. For these participants, their college experience was life-changing and afforded them opportunities that many never imagined, or thought were possible. Overall, they gained a quality education that has prepared them for success in the workplace. However, they also gained a tremendous amount of knowledge from mentors and by participating in activities that took them beyond the classroom. Remarkably, these men were resilient in their pursuit of a postsecondary degree.

Summary of Findings

Data analysis revealed several meaningful findings and themes. Findings are the recurring patterns and themes supported by the data from which they were derived (Merriam, 2009). First, the participants credited having a positive campus climate as vital to their lived experienced while enrolled in college. A general agreement exists that climate is a multifaceted measure of people's attitudes about, perceptions of, and experiences within a certain

environment (Glisson & James, 2002). More specifically institutional characteristics such as having engaged instructors, small class sizes, a diverse student body, and a welcoming campus environment all emerged as a way to maximize the academic potential for Black men who enroll in technical colleges. The role of the institution must be taken into consideration by colleges that are attempting to improve student achievement which is a critical component of the student's lived experience (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). The role of institutional characteristics are enhanced in the technical college setting due to their policies on open enrollment and access.

Subsequently, two-year institutions such as technical colleges are challenged to develop practices that assist students to reach their academic goals despite their demographic or educational background. This is especially true for Black men as the two-year college often represents their first experience with postsecondary education and is often their last option for obtaining a degree beyond a high school diploma (Bush & Bush, 2010).

Another key finding that emerged is that the participants in this study highlighted the importance of having mentors and strong family support as part of their lived experience. Mentors play a vital and are critical to the success of Black men in postsecondary education. Having men on campus, especially Black men, who were able to provide support, encouragement, and connect them with the appropriate resources proved vital to their connection with the campus community and led them to have success academically. Scott (2012) highlighted the importance of mentors on campus, suggesting that they can serve to create a welcoming and affirming campus climate.

Family support in the participants' lives as they experienced college was also vital. Family members consistently provided varying levels of motivation and support including financial support, childcare and encouraging words. Several of them also had assistance with the

transfer process and physical aspect of moving from city to city and navigating the college enrollment process.

The third finding was that the participants benefited from engaging with student support services on their respective campuses and specifically with tutoring and library services. One strategy for increasing student persistence and achievement outcomes lies in the area of student support services (Cooper, 2010). For example, tutoring proved essential with many of the participants as they faced difficult academic subjects and needed the support. Tutoring was reliable and accessible. It provided students with feelings of confidence as they navigated the collegiate environment. The library provided academic space for studying as well as access to technology such as computers which were resourceful for completing research projects, homework activities, group projects, and other assignments.

The next finding was the significant role that being involved with campus activities and organizations played in their lived experiences as college students. Student involvement enhances self-confidence as well as interpersonal and leadership skills (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Participants credited organizations such as Phi Beta Lambda and Skills USA as being essential to their positive collegiate experience. They were afforded opportunities which included having the ability to travel across the U.S., network with other students, learn the importance of dressing professionally, and learn how to prepare for job interviews. They also had the opportunity to showcase the skills being learned throughout their academic programs.

The last finding explored the impact of external factors and employment was the common theme that emerged. Participants worked at least part-time while enrolled in college, and some worked multiple jobs while enrolled. They were creative in balancing work and school responsibilities by obtaining jobs on campus, either as part-time employees or student workers. This helped them meet financial demands, while also affording the opportunity to learn job skills.

Practice Recommendations

The two-year college represents the first experience with postsecondary education and is often African American male students' last option for obtaining a degree beyond a high school diploma (Bush & Bush, 2010). Two-year institutions such as community and technical colleges are striving to become the most effective resource to address the plight of Black men in higher education. Technical colleges may want to consider implementing the following policies which are aimed at improving the lived experiences of their Black male students.

Establish formal mentorship programs with Black men

Formal mentorship programs can provide the opportunity to link college and community professionals directly to the learning process. These programs allow for the development of enhanced communication skills, career exposure, and possibly ethnic identification in a professional field giving students the opportunity to share educational, cultural, and professional experiences. For example, programs such as the Minority Male Success Initiative being used in the state of North Carolina has a strong student focus and has been designed to support the academic and professional aspirations of male students of color enrolled in two-year postsecondary colleges. The goals of this program focus on mentorship or relationship building with campus coaches, academic skills training, strong academic advising, and service-learning

projects. Mentoring programs are avenues to help Black men better understand their roles as college students (Kingsbury, 2007) and encourage a sense of belonging within institutions of higher learning (Harper & Quaye, 2007).

Develop strategic partnerships that support Black men

Colleges and universities have an institutional responsibility for strategic partnerships with PreK-12, other postsecondary institutions, and industry (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Technical colleges should work with their PreK-12 partners to begin the process of making students aware of expectations and competencies for collegiate enrollment and success. Partnerships with local school districts are vital to ensure that students are being introduced to college preparedness and success measures early. This should include events that expose them to the college campus such as tours and academic camps. PreK-12 students should also have the opportunity to engage with a diverse group of current college students and professionals who can serve as visual role models to reinforce the idea that college is in fact for them. This can be critical for men of color who often perceive school as a White female domain due to their PreK-12 experiences (Harris & Harper, 2008).

Secondly, partnerships with other postsecondary institutions is vital especially for your two-year institutions such as technical and community colleges. These institutions continue to serve as the primary pathway into postsecondary education for men of color. Furthermore, Black men often enter these institutions with the intent to transfer or articulate credit to another college or university. Several scholars have noted that successful transfer opportunities are made possible due to strong partnerships, articulation agreements, and mutual commitments between both institutions that are involved (Fryer & Turner, 1990). These institutions must work to ensure smooth transitions that foster a culture of success.

Finally, industry partnerships are another asset to facilitate success for Black men in the technical college environment. Colleges should establish partnerships that result in students being exposed to professional opportunities such as internships, co-ops, fellowships, apprenticeship, etc. that allow graduates to gain skills and experience to better position themselves to compete in a global job market. Given that Black men can often face ominous employment rates, colleges must be intentional about these efforts.

Implement campus activities that engage Black men

Research suggests that a positive relationship exist between involvement in student organizations and academic success for Black men (Harper & Quaye, 2007). For example, Museus (2008), conducted a study with Black students and found that ethnic organizations served as spaces for cultural expression and validation for minority students. These organizations also provide Black men with the essential opportunities to create supportive and nurturing relationships with faculty, staff, and other students. Additionally, Brown (2006) explained that intramural athletics, recreational activities, student union programing, and mentoring that support extracurricular involvement are spaces that help create opportunities for Black male campus engagement and ultimately lead to positive experiences for the students. Palmer and Young (2009) suggested that colleges should consider surveying Black men in order to get a better understanding of their interest and the activities implementing should reflect those interests. Activities and programing should focus on academics and career exploration and should not be purely social in nature (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012).

Future Research Recommendations

Strategic planning and foresight are essential qualities for leaders within higher education as they seek to make improvements in policy and practice. Continued research examining the lived experiences of Black men that graduate from technical colleges could help stakeholders understand the factors that influence success along with factors that create obstacles along the way. For example, the academic experience is an essential piece of the campus climate and is important as it relates to student success. Technical college instructors should be studied and surveyed to better understand their perceptions about the experiences of Black men. A deeper understanding could reveal key elements regarding race and gender relations. Instructors have an enormous impact on the experiences of Black men, understanding their philosophy is certainly worth studying.

Secondly, additional research should be considered that examines equity, access, and participation in career and technical education (CTE) for Black men. CTE programs should be designed with equitable access and outcomes to address racial disparities and improve opportunity gaps. Once Black students enter college, they are more likely to leave academic programs in STEM fields (Bauer-Wolf, 2019). Multiple factors significantly impact this trend including students experiencing racial bias or not meeting academic expectations. Prospective employers also play a role in addressing racial equity within CTE. Employers must continue to engage with students through high-quality work-based learning initiatives such as internships and apprenticeships. These programs should connect students with employers from industries that focus on educational mobility and economic prosperity preparing students for careers of the future.

If replicated, this study may also garner pertinent information if designed utilizing focus groups as the primary data collection method. This study was conducted using semi-structured individual interviews. However, the dynamics of the focus group often create safe spaces accessible for Black men to make sense of and share resources that assist them in navigating the college experience (Rendon, 2002). The focus group is a powerful tool for Black males to enrich the narrative, provide nuance and clarity to validate their unique lived experiences, and have a chance to reconnect and reflect with other students who are reinventing themselves through higher education (Rendon, 2002).

Conclusion

Reflecting on this experience has truly been impactful. As a Black male graduate of a technical college and having the opportunity to serve as a current technical college administrator, I have witnessed the success, challenges, and I share in the lived experiences of these men. While each experience is different, it was intriguing to hear commonalities and learn from the participants regarding their college experience. Creating the space for Black men to share perceptions about their educational accomplishments has the capacity to strengthen their resolve and confidence within other areas of their life.

Secondly, this study aims to contribute to the body of literature that seeks to understand the lived experiences of Black men who have graduated from technical colleges. Understanding these experiences can help higher education decision-makers enact policies and processes that will help create a culture of success for these students as they navigate postsecondary education. This success could include closing the achievement gap among the Black male student population, improving retention along with graduation rates, and finally helping to ensure a highly-skilled workforce that is ready to compete on a global stage.

Finally, hearing directly from these men about their educational journey was a great learning experience allowing us to also connect in a meaningful way. Talking directly with them allowed me to self-reflect on my experience as a student. It led me back to a place of unpacking my feelings and emotions regarding academic challenges, work-life balance, and campus involvement. Sharing their experiences in higher education also reinforces the narrative that their opinion matters when developing effective strategies that seek to improve the campus climate and therefore improve their experience. This study reflects the voices of several Black men as they shared stories related to their higher education experience. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to interact with them and I hope their stories are shared across various avenues leading to a successful experience for Black men pursuing degrees in technical education.

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APPENDIX A

STUDY INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Dear Participant,

My name is Alvie Coes, III. I am a doctoral student at The University of Georgia, Athens, GA, under the direction of Professor Jay Rojewski in the department of Career and Information Sciences in the Mary Frances Early College of Education at The University of Georgia. I am currently working on a dissertation entitled “Understanding the lived experiences of Black men who have graduated from a technical college.” This study seeks to understand the experiences of Black men and allow them to share in their own words factors that contributed to their success.

I would like to invite you to participate in an important study that will allow you an opportunity to express your views and perspectives as a Black male who has graduated from a technical college. With your help and insight, various stakeholders throughout higher education could use this information to improve services and the overall educational experience of students, particularly Black men. If you agree to participate, we will confirm an appropriate date and time to conduct an informal interview in a private and confidential manner. The location will be established after your agreement to participate has been confirmed. Permission will be obtained to record or audio tape the interview for accuracy in obtaining detailed information that will allow the interview to be transcribed effectively. No recording will take place without prior permission. Furthermore, data from the interviews and meetings will be kept confidential and secured. Participant’s names or any other identifying information will not be used at any time within the research. All data will be destroyed three years after the collection process and completion of the study analyses. Additional information along with any questions will be explained during the initial meeting.

Please be aware that participation in the study is solely voluntary. Participant’s names and other identifying information will be kept anonymous. Participants may receive a copy of the study results and any transcribed data upon their request. Participants also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time throughout their participation without penalty or adverse actions against them.

If you are interested in participating by sharing your college experiences, please email or contact me to schedule an interview. If you have any additional questions or concerns related to the study, feel free to contact me as well.

Thanks,

Alvie Coes, III
ac39762@uga.edu
229-869-3743

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Understanding the Lived Experiences of Black Men that have Graduated from a Technical College

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study to understand the lived experiences of Black men who have graduated from a technical college to understand what factors led to their success. You were selected as a possible participant because you identified as a Black male who has graduated from a two-year technical college. We ask that you read this form thoroughly and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study. This study is being conducted by: Alvie Coes, III, Principle Investigator, Department of Career & Information Sciences at the Mary Frances Early College of Education at the University of Georgia in Athens, GA.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand the college experiences from the perspective of the Black male technical college student. Exploring and sharing their experiences directly may help lead to advancement in higher education opportunities and practices that lead to increased retention, persistence, and graduation in higher education.

Procedures:

Participants agreeing to participate in this study will be contacted either by phone or email based on their contact preference to schedule an interview to complete the study. The researcher will explain the overall process and restate expectations prior to conducting the interview to ensure full understanding of the study and address any concerns before the process begins. During the interview, the researcher will ask specific questions related to the academic enrollment experiences, external commitments, involvement on campus, and other academic related information while transcribing answers. Interview transcriptions will be compiled into an overall research summary. No real names will be used within the study; therefore, participants will be asked to assign their own pseudonym (false name) to ensure confidentiality and privacy. The individual interviews should take approximately one-hour to complete and will be recorded using an audio recorder to ensure conversation and information is transcribed thoroughly in its entirety. The interviews will be held in a private location. No other participants will be involved during the interview process.

Risks to being in the study:

Risks to participating in this research study may be discomfort from using personal information and overall confidentiality of providing information related to their college experiences. Participants will have the opportunity at any time to withdraw from the study. The researcher reassures involvement in the study will have no bearing on their records and their involvement is purely voluntary. Participants will be informed that all records obtained in this study will be kept private. In any sort of information published, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant.

Benefits of being this study:

The benefits of participation in this study would include helping researchers and educators understand factors that play an important role in understanding the lived experiences of Black men who attend technical colleges. Through this understanding, the development of new or improved academic and social programs can be established to help with the success of future students. Other elements could be identified that would help college administrators improve the success rates of Black men as well as retention and recruitment strategies. Other benefits could include additional funding to support the establishment of programs that target Black men on their technical college campuses.

Compensation:

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. All information obtained within the study from participants will be used solely by the researcher and kept in a secured location that does not allow public access. Data collected in this study will remain confidential and used for the sole purpose of the study.

Interviews will be transcribed and transferred onto a thumb drive which will be kept in a locked file for the required amount of time. Information on the stored media will only be disclosed if necessary to the University of Georgia IRB. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher will continue to use the assigned pseudonyms to protect the identity and related information associated with participants throughout the study. After the completion of the research study, the researcher will permanently dispose of all primary records related to the study. Documentation of the data destruction will be logged and maintained indefinitely.

Voluntary nature of the study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with the technical college attended or the University of Georgia. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time.

Contacts and questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Alvie Coes, III. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have any questions later, you are encouraged to contact me at 229-869-3743 or by email at alviecoes@gmail.com or you may contact the research advisor, Dr. Jay Rojewski, at Department of Career and Information Sciences, Mary Frances Early College of Education at the University of Georgia at rojewski@uga.edu. You will be given a copy of this information to keep your records.

Consent to record (please read and check authorizing usage of voice recording)

I give my permission for Alvie Coes, III, doctoral candidate from The University of Georgia, to audiotape, record, or otherwise reproduce my voice for the purpose of his interview with me.

Statement of consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. What was your main reason for attending a two-year technical college?
2. What were the college factors that contributed to your college success?
3. How would you describe your academic experiences during the first year in college?
4. Did you use any academic support services while you were enrolled as a student?
5. When considering your outside responsibilities, was it a challenge to complete your education?
6. What would you tell administrators or policymakers regarding your educational experiences?
7. How encouraging was your family (spouse, children, parents, etc.) when it came to finishing your degree?
8. Do you feel that faculty and staff on campus were supportive of you as a Black male completing your college degree?
9. Did you have a mentor to help guide you through various phases of the college process?
10. Do you feel that your educational experiences were different based on your race? Why or why not?
11. Were you involved with campus activities and programs? Why or Why not?

APPENDIX D

INVITATIONAL FLYER

INVITATIONAL FLYER TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Request for participation in a research study

Request:	Seeking Black men technical college graduates as volunteers
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Hello!

My name is Alvie Coes, III. I am a doctoral student at The University of Georgia in Athens, GA. I'm seeking volunteers to participate in a research study entitled "Understanding the lived experiences of Black men who have graduated from a technical college".

In order to be eligible to participate, the following must apply: must be male; must be of African-American or Black decent; 18-years or older; graduated from a technical college; willing to sign an informed consent form acknowledging willingness to participate in the study.

If you are interested in participating and would like more information regarding this study, please contact me at (229) 869-3743 or by email at ac39762@uga.edu

Sincerely,
Alvie Coes, III

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Initial Interview Script

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. My name is Alvie Coes, III and I am a current doctoral student at The University of Georgia in Athens, GA, under the direction of Professor Jay Rojewski in the Career and Information Sciences Department within the Mary Frances Early College of Education at The University of Georgia. I am currently working on a dissertation entitled “*Understanding the Lived Experiences of Black Men Who Have Graduated from a Technical College*”. This study seeks to understand the experiences of Black men while they were enrolled in college along with factors that contributed to their success.

Your participation in this study is important. It allows an opportunity for expressing your views and perspectives of higher education as a college graduate. With your help, educators, institutional administrators, and other stakeholders might be able to improve ongoing services targeting this specific population and could implement other services that will enhance educational experiences for all students.

Upon your agreement to participate, we will establish an appropriate date and time to conduct an informal interview. The interview should only take approximately one hour of your time. The location will be established upon agreement in a private and confidential manner. Permission will be obtained to audio record the interview. Please note there will not be any audio recording without your express permission. All data from the interviews will be kept confidential and locked in a secure area. Your name or any identifying information will not be used at any time within the research. All data will be destroyed three years after the collection process and completion of the study analyses.

Please be aware, your participation in the study is voluntary; Names and any other personal identifying information will be kept anonymous, and answers kept confidential. You may receive a copy of the study results and any transcribed data upon your request. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time throughout your participation without penalty or adverse actions against you.

If you are interested in participating, please complete the consent form (PASS OUT THE INFORMED CONSENT FORM). I will now read the consent form (CONSENT FORM IS READ OUTLOUD). If you need additional time to review the consent form, you may take it with you and contact me with your response. Remember, participation is voluntary and

confidential. If you agree to the information listed on the consent form and agree to participate, please sign, date, and return the consent form. You will also receive a copy of the signed form. Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study. I will be in contact with you to schedule the individual interview based on your schedule and convenience. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Individual Interview Script

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this data collection process. The purpose of this data collection is to collect data that examines your views and perspectives on higher education as a Black male who has graduate from a technical college. Before commencing the interview, please read your signed informed consent form to ensure that you understand what is being requested as a participant of this study. Please note, that with your express permission, this interview will be recorded for accuracy. If you do not wish to have this interview recorded, please state the information now before any proceedings.

(TAPE RECORDER PRESENT.....BEGINS)

Please note, you may end the interview at any time. You will be asked 11 questions related to your higher educational experience. Please answer your questions based on your perceptions, there are no right or wrong answers! If you desire, a transcript of the interview will be provided for you to check for accuracy after the interview process.