

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT: THE IMPACT OF THE COOPER-WOODSON
COLLEGE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM ON AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN
HIGHER EDUCATION

A Thesis

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Marvin James Reed, Jr.

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by

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Graduate and Professional Studies in Education

Abstract
of
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT: THE IMPACT OF THE COOPER-WOODSON
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Brief Literature Review

Trends in higher education have pointed out a huge gap in persistence and degree attainment at universities among certain ethnic groups. Laws and bills have been passed to ensure people of color have the opportunity to access higher education; however, the focus has shifted from getting students from just being enrolled in a university to helping them successfully persist to graduation. Today, African American males continue to fall behind White counterparts in relation to college participation, retention, persistence, and degree completion (Noguera, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999).

Statement of the Problem

For California State University, Sacramento to increase its current retention and graduation rates regarding the African American male student population, the university must have a retention program for students that provides a holistic, student-centered approach through mentorship, academic

advising, and student-to-faculty interactions reflecting the diverse student population; this will establish a sense of belonging and enhance a student's learning and graduation persistence. In the fall of 2015, the university enrolled 3,820 first time freshmen students. Prior to this enrollment, less than 6% of the African American student population persisted to degree completion from the years 2011-2015 (California State University, Sacramento, 2015). If California State University, Sacramento (Sacramento State) does not proactively identify new strategies for retention of African American males through innovative programming and support services, there is strong potential for the university to not retain current and or potential students due to lack of student engagement. This study examines African American males' educational persistence by evaluating the impact of the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program at Sacramento State. This study addressed the following questions:

1. What challenges do African American males face in higher education regarding graduation persistence?
2. How does the Cooper-Woodson College program promote persistence and graduation for African American males?
3. How does the Cooper-Woodson College program impact student development through service learning?

Methodology

This qualitative research sought to understand the impact of the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program on African American males and to analyze factors influencing these students' persistence to degree completion. Specifically, respondents were 10 African American male students who successfully completed the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program. Students were asked to share the obstacles they faced in higher education, to describe how the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program helped them persist, and to describe their service learning experiences.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concluded that while African American males encounter different obstacles in navigating the educational pipeline, with the support of professors and staff, an inclusive and culturally diverse environment, and community to motivate and or encourage academic success is an obtainable goal. The results of this study can be used by educators and policymakers to develop different initiatives to support, promote, and encourage the educational success of all students of color, particularly African American males.

_____, Committee Chair
Aaminah Norris, Ph.D.

Date

DEDICATION

Dedicated to the EDLP 2015 Cohort and Nolari Cohort 2018

“Some people are meant to come into your life for a lifetime, some for only a season, and you got to know which is which. And you're always messing up when you mix those seasonal people up with lifetime expectations.

I put everybody that comes into my life in the category of a tree. Some people are like leaves on a tree. When the wind blows, they're over there . . . wind blows that way, they over here . . . they're unstable. When the seasons change, they wither and die, they're gone. That's alright. Most people are like that, they're not there to do anything but take from the tree and give shade every now and then. That's all they can do. But don't get mad at people like that, that's who they are.

That's all they were put on this earth to be. A leaf.

Some people are like a branch on that tree. You have to be careful with those branches too, cause they'll fool you. They'll make you think they're a good friend and they're real strong but the minute you step out there on them, they'll break and leave you high and dry.

But if you find 2 or 3 people in your life that's like the roots at the bottom of that tree, you are blessed. Those are the kind of people that aren't going nowhere. They aren't worried about being seen, nobody has to know that they know you, they don't have to know what they're doing for you but if those roots weren't there, that tree couldn't live.

A tree could have a hundred million branches, but it only takes a few roots down at the bottom to make sure that tree gets everything it needs. When you get some roots, hold on to them but the rest of it . . . just let it go. Let folks go."

Madea

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Dedication | viii |
| List of Tables | xii |
| List of Figures | xiii |
| Chapter | |
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Background | 1 |
| Statement of the Problem..... | 4 |
| Definition of Terms..... | 5 |
| Limitations of the Study..... | 6 |
| Organization of the Remainder of the Study | 6 |
| 2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE | 8 |
| Introduction..... | 8 |
| Theoretical Frameworks | 9 |
| A Historical Perspective on African American Higher Education | 14 |
| Factors Affecting African American Males in Education | 20 |
| Current Trends of African Americans in Higher Education | 25 |

| | |
|---|----|
| 3. METHODOLOGY | 28 |
| Introduction..... | 28 |
| Research Design..... | 29 |
| Design of the Study..... | 30 |
| Limitations of the Study..... | 33 |
| 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS | 34 |
| Introduction..... | 34 |
| Demographics | 35 |
| Interview Results | 36 |
| Other Factors..... | 45 |
| Discussion..... | 46 |
| Summary of Findings..... | 48 |
| Summary | 50 |
| 5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... | 51 |
| Summary | 51 |
| Conclusions..... | 52 |
| Recommendations..... | 56 |
| Appendix A. Interview Questions..... | 62 |
| Appendix B. Consent Letter | 63 |
| References..... | 64 |

LIST OF TABLES

| Tables | Page |
|---|------|
| 1. Student Demographics California State University, Sacramento, 2015 | 29 |
| 2. Demographic Information for Research Participants | 35 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| Figures | Page |
|--|------|
| 1. Ecological Systems Model for African American Male Theory | 14 |

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

The higher education degree attainment crisis confronting African American males is one of the most pressing issues in United States education. Research has shown that in contrast to other demographic groups, African American male students have the lowest educational results in the nation (Palmer, Davis, Moore, & Hilton, 2010). African American males are underrepresented in higher education, accounting for less than 6% of the entire U.S. undergraduate population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Furthermore, African American males have the highest attrition and lowest degree completion rates among all ethnic groups and genders.

Many students have a difficult time achieving academic success throughout their educational journey. Most of the scholarly literature is composed of statistics and studies illustrating poor performance and underachievement of African American male students (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). In education, African American males are more likely placed in special education courses, given referrals for disciplinary actions, and labeled as low academic achievers. This slippery slope leads to the fact that fewer than half of the U.S. population of African American males who enter the ninth grade will earn their high school

diplomas (Mitchell, 2017). In regard to African American males, statistics highlight a reality of the many young students leaving public schools with or without diplomas; they are unprepared academically to pursue higher education and faced with greater challenges of gaining access to economic, social, and political opportunities. It is predicted, if the current trend of low graduation and enrollment continues, African American males may no longer be involved with higher education by the year 2070 (Cross & Slater, 2000). The lack of academic success in K-12 and the declining rate of African American male student college participation raise significant concerns for educators, researchers, higher education administrators, and economists throughout the nation who see a college degree as a key to life's opportunities and or upward social mobility (Fleming, 1984; Gregory, 2000; Grove & Fisher, 1999).

Kazis, Vargas, and Hoffman (2004) have argued that students of color, particularly African American [male] students, experience challenges navigating through the educational pipeline or transition from high school to college. Horn and Chen (1998) identified the educational pipeline as five major components: college preparation, successful completion of college entrance exams, aspirations for obtaining a college degree, access to college, and enrollment in college. In the California education system, college readiness is defined as the completion of specific high school coursework known as the “A-G Requirements” for admission to the state's public 4-year universities. For many African Americans or any

students of color, the college application and enrollment process itself is seen as a challenge. The challenge includes the lack of information about college requirements, admission procedures, and financial aid. This is particularly true for low-income and first-generation college-going students whose parents are unfamiliar with the process and are unable to guide them.

The enrollment process consists of three major tasks: meet the necessary academic qualifications for college-level work (A-G Requirements), graduate from high school, and apply to and enroll in a college. If different interventions to educate and inform family, teachers, school counselor, peers, and the community about navigating the path of higher education existed, more students may be aware of the steps and qualifications of pursuing higher education.

The higher level of engagement a student has in an institution, the more satisfied they will be with their educational experience, thus, directly affecting their persistence (Tinto, 1975). In higher education, building relationships among peers, faculty, and administration is a form of student engagement that can help persistence. Founded in 1990, the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program (CWCP) is an African American retention program providing students with scholarships, academic resources, and mentoring. The CWCP is composed of faculty, staff, students, and community members who recognize and uphold the tradition represented in African American culture that is best expressed in the relationships between traditional African American colleges and students. The

program promotes African American culture through educational events, seminars, and community/campus involvement. The key objective of Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program is to develop leaders who will be prepared to give back to the community (California State University, Sacramento [CSUS], n.d.).

Statement of the Problem

For California State University, Sacramento to increase its current retention and graduation rates for the African American male student population, the university needs a retention program for students that provides a holistic, student-centered approach through mentorship, academic advising, and student-to-faculty interactions reflecting the diverse student population; this will establish a sense of belonging, a student's learning, and graduation persistence. In fall of 2015, the university enrolled 3,820 first time freshmen students. Prior to this enrollment, less than 6% of the African American student population persisted to degree completion from the years 2011-2015 (California State University, Sacramento, 2015). If California State University, Sacramento (Sacramento State) does not proactively identify new strategies for retention of African American males through innovative programming and support services, there is strong potential for Sacramento State to lose current and or potential students.

This study examined African American males' educational persistence by evaluating the impact of the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program at Sacramento State. The study sought to explore challenges African American males in higher education face in regard to degree attainment and student involvement through service learning initiatives of African American males in the program. This study addressed the following questions:

1. What challenges do African American males face in higher education regarding graduation persistence?
2. How does the Cooper-Woodson College program promote persistence and graduation for African American males?
3. How does the Cooper-Woodson College program impact student development through service learning?

Definition of Terms

Attainment

Academic achievement of a Bachelor's degree or higher

Persistence

Staying in school until completing a degree or certificate program

Resilience

The process and results that are part of the life story of an individual who has been academically successful, despite obstacles that prevent the majority of others with the same background from succeeding (Morales & Trotman, 2011, p. 8).

Theoretical Framework

Structured theoretical basis used to analyze concepts and understanding of a particular issue.

Limitations of the Study

All studies have some limitations, and researchers should be honest about these limitations and how they affect the results of the study. The researcher of this study identifies one limitation. This study focused on African American males who have attended and graduated from the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program at Sacramento State within the past five years. Focusing on a relatively small sample size of one ethnicity, one gender, and one campus can limit the ability to generalize the results.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 2 provides a review of existing research and related literature. Chapter 3 describes the research

methodology used in collecting and analyzing the data. Chapter 4 presents the data collected from the interviews. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study along with conclusions, recommendations, and implications for future research.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the literature focusing on the educational attainment of African American males. This study focused on the African American male alumni of the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program who successfully completed the program's curriculum and obtained a bachelor's degree with the hope that others with the same aspirations may achieve their dreams and persist through higher education. This research can be used as a valuable tool to help assist educators, parents, and students to close the achievement gap of African American male students in education. This study used three theoretical frameworks to drive the research. Tinto's Student Integration Theory theorizes that students who socially integrate into the campus community increase their commitment to the institution and are more likely to graduate (Tinto, 1975). Transformational Leadership is a leadership approach that causes change in individuals and social systems (Burns, 1978). African American Male Theory (AAMT) is a theoretical framework used to articulate the position and trajectory of African American boys and men in society (Bush & Bush, 2013). Specifically, this chapter presents and discusses an historical perspective on African American males in higher education and external factors that can impact

academic success while providing current trends on African Americans in Higher Education.

Theoretical Frameworks

Student Integration Theory

Alexander Tinto's research (1975) suggests students are more likely to remain enrolled in college as they become connected to the social and academic life of the institution. Tinto proposed that increased levels of academic and social integration will lead to greater commitment to the institution and to the goal of graduation (Bean, 1983). These commitments in turn increase the likelihood a student will persist and graduate (Bean, 1983). Further, he asserted that families pass on advantages of their social position to their children via a process of expectation development, an idea consistent with status attainment theories and the literature on first-generation students. Students who become integrated into a college by developing connections to individuals, participating in clubs, such as retention programs such as the Cooper Woodson College Enhancement Program (CWCP), or engaging in academic activities are more likely to persist than those who remain on the periphery. Preventing this integration process may be incongruence, or a lack of institutional fit. Students who do not feel at home in an institution or do not believe that an institution can help them meet their goals are unlikely to persist. Likewise, students who are isolated, or who do not engage in

social interactions within the college, are less likely to persist in the institution. Both incongruence and isolation inhibit the integration process, thereby inhibiting persistence (Tinto, 1975).

Tinto's framework (1975) has also been applied to many studies of student persistence in postsecondary education. Tinto pointed out that student integration into an institution can occur along two dimensions: the academic and the social (Tinto, 1975). Academic integration occurs when students become attached to the intellectual life of the college, while social integration occurs when students create relationships and connections outside the classroom. These two concepts, though analytically distinct, interact with and enhance one another. And, while students must be integrated into the institution along both dimensions to increase their likelihood of persistence, they need not be equally integrated along the two. Likewise, Tinto noted both formal and informal systems within institutions can encourage integration and persistence. Supportive programs and services such as mentoring, advising, and clubs and organizations can potentially influence institutional commitment and satisfaction by increasing the engagement of African American males in higher education; engagement has a powerful impact on students' educational experience and success (Cuseo, 2003). The leaders of a retention or support program, such as CWCP, have the ability to motivate students to persist to degree attainment with charisma to attain a common goal. James

Macgregor Burns (1978) describes this as a characteristic of transformational leadership.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is typically divided into four major components: (a) inspirational motivation, (b) idealized influence, (c) individualized consideration, and (d) intellectual stimulation. Inspirational motivation involves the ability to communicate clearly and effectively while inspiring workers to achieve important organizational goals. Transformational leaders are considered to be enthusiastic and optimistic when speaking about the future, which arouses and heightens their followers' motivation (Dubinsky, Yammarino, Jolson, & Spangler, 1995). Idealized influence refers to behaviors that help to provide a role model for followers. Such behaviors could involve displaying strong ethical principles and stressing group benefits over individual benefits. Individualized consideration involves treating each follower as an individual with his or her own unique needs and attending to these needs (Bono & Judge, 2004). The focus of behaviors falling under the individualized consideration category is on the development of the follower (Bass, 1985). Lastly, intellectual stimulation involves encouraging the follower to be creative and challenging him or her to think of old problems in new ways (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders create a culture of active thinking through intellectual

stimulation, and this culture encourages followers to become more involved in the organization (Tims, Bakker, & Xanthopoulou, 2011).

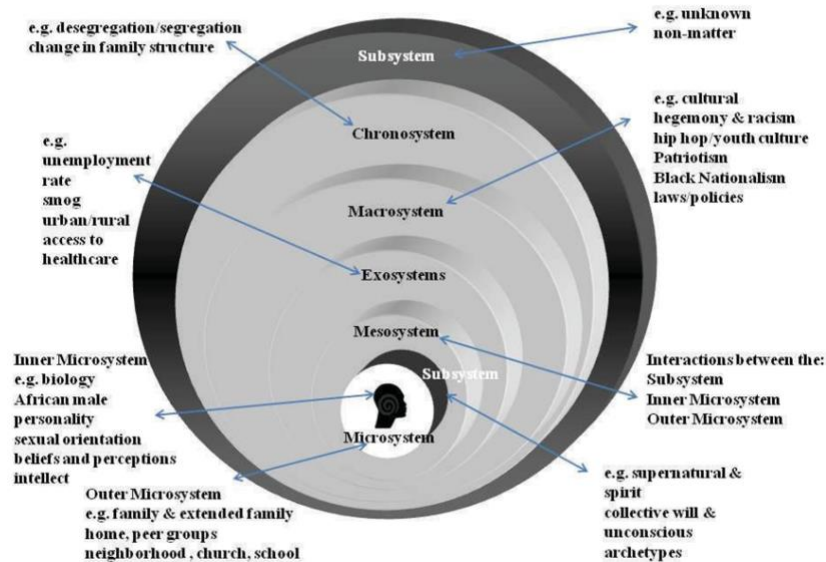
African American Male Theory (AAMT)

In addition to the idea of transformational leadership, the focus and purpose of programs in higher education concerning African American males should be the pursuit of social justice for students (Bush & Bush, 2013). African American students who are integrated in their learning are able to learn and have a sense of belonging. Furthermore, faculty that can empower and transform their students are able to create an environment where students are able to persist through their for students to see African American Male Theory (AAMT) is a theoretical framework that can be used to articulate the position and trajectory of African American males in society by drawing on and accounting for pre- and post-enslavement experiences while capturing their spiritual, psychological, social, and educational development and station (Bush & Bush, 2013). The intent of AAMT is to undermine oppression by investigating, exposing, and correcting those practices, policies, programs, systems, concepts, and institutions that promote its continuation (Young, 1990) The six principles of AAMT are that the individual and collective experiences, behaviors, outcomes, events, phenomena, and trajectory of African American boys and men's lives are best analyzed using an ecological systems approach (Bush & Bush, 2013). AAMT provides the conceptual framework to describe and analyze the interrelated structures, systems,

and processes that occur in these dynamic and multidimensional environments that influence and shape the development, experiences, outcomes, and trajectory of African American boys and men (Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003). While the stories of oppressed people should never be forgotten and are necessary for students to thoroughly investigate, AAMT encourages students to move away from damage-centered (Tuck, 2009) and reactive approaches or deficit model (Bush & Bush, 2013).

Given the three theoretical frames, it is important to understand their interconnectedness in education. The degree to which the leader articulates a vision that is appealing and inspiring to followers. Leaders with inspirational motivation challenge followers with high standards, communicate optimism about future goals, and provide meaning for the task at hand. This is communicated in retentions programs, such as the CWCP in this study. In addition, African Americans need to have a strong sense of purpose if they are to be motivated to act. Purpose and meaning provide the energy that drives a group forward. The purpose of AAMT is not to respond to cultural hegemony and racism, but rather to explicitly draw upon the historical and current culture and community to empower African American males to persist. (Bush & Bush, 2013).

Figure 1 Ecological Systems Model for African American Male Theory



An Historical Perspective on African Americans in Higher Education

African American males are more willing to invest more effort in their future, tasks, and believe in themselves when they are integrated, both academically and socially, in an institution (Tinto, 1975). Historically, African Americans males have seen educational opportunity as a primary way to overcome practices of oppression and discrimination (Allen & Jewell, 2002). From the early colonization of America, to the defeat of the Jim-Crow era ideals in recent decades, African Americans have experienced great racial inequality because of the color of their skin (Lawrence & Keleher, 2004).

The history of African Americans in higher education directly correlates to the ways in which they were treated in society (Kohl, 2002). Upon colonization

of America, the slave trade kept African Americans cemented in the position of property, subservient to the Caucasian man and without room for improvement (Cook & Glass, 2013). At this time, the thought of education for African Americans was a far-fetched dream that many held but learning such basics as the alphabet or arithmetic resulted in severe punishment by masters or owners. In essence, it can be said that education is the key to bettering oneself as it opens doors and offers numerous opportunities.

Slave masters understood that their social control of the slaves could not be based solely on physical coercion. Knowledge was power, and virtually all slave codes established in the United States set restrictions making it illegal to teach slaves to read or write (Bernard, Hoggard & Neblett, 2018). A text in which one can see knowledge as a key to freedom is the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (Douglass & Garrison, 1846, p. 33). The book is a firsthand account of how an individual rose from a slave having nothing to a free man via the help of his education. In the narrative, the slave master's wife-Mrs. Auld begins to teach young Fredrick the ABCs and basic spelling and gets caught committing the crime of teaching him literacy:

If you teach a nigger to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a

great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy.

(Douglass & Garrison, 1846, p. 33).

Despite the “crime” being committed, Douglass continued to learn to read and, as he did so, he became unfit for slavery and he became unmanageable, of no value to his master, and unhappy. Douglass mentions reading several books on emancipation. His books sparked a tremendous change in Douglass’s worldview. Where before he had sensed the injustice of slavery, now he had arguments proving contradictions and inconsistencies (Wallace & Constantine, 2005). As seen in this example, many freed African Americans considered education as the key tool that could lift them out of slavery and Jim Crow-laws that imposed racial segregation and restricted the freedoms gained by African Americans during Reconstruction (Lovett, 1990).

As the United States developed and grew, and tensions arose between the North and South with regards to African American status in society, the possibility of education became closer to a reality than the dream it had once been (Beckham, 2000). With Abraham Lincoln spearheading the Northern push for abolition and the South still fighting for their right to possess slaves, education became a popular topic of discussion. Many in the North began to adopt sympathy for the African American men, and felt their role in society was not dissimilar to their own (Shapiro, 2004).

Around this same time in history, the concept of “separate but equal” (Civil Rights Act, 1964) began to develop. Even if Caucasians did not believe in the full integration of African Americans into society, they allowed African Americans to live their own lives so long as they did not interfere with Caucasian business (Cook & Glass, 2013). This business included education, and with the passing of the land grant Second Morrill Act in 1890, in addition to some of the minor institutions of African American education that existed previously, many historically African American colleges were established (Hilton, 2017). In the south, however, much of the anti-African American sentiment was still prominent even after the Southern defeat in the Civil War, and many states passed legislature forbidding the teaching of African Americans and Caucasians together; this state-sanctioned racism would continue into the 20th century (Jacobson, 2017).

The G.I. Bill that was used as an incentive program to help troops who served in the war gain education was extended to include African Americans (Kohl, 2002). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the World Wars were one of the most important events in the history of the United States that helped improve African American education (Cook & Glass, 2013). As demand for troops grew in the foreign theaters of war, the US Army looked to African American males for support of the cause (Bruce, 2013). It was following the Second World War that higher education for African Americans evolved from a distant dream into a realistic possibility (Cook & Glass, 2013). Not only did the

bill allow for African American students' admission into a previously unavailable level of education, it would serve to provide education for those civil rights activists who would lead the charge for African American equality in the future (Thelin, 2004). These men and women whose education stemmed from the G.I Bill would go on to fight for the rights of African Americans and demand their equality during the Civil Rights era (Hall, 2005).

The Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* was the most significant ruling in favor of African American educational opportunity during this period (Prat, 2002). The *Brown* ruling stated that segregation in public schools denied African Americans equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment. *Brown v. Board of Education* essentially reversed the 1896 *Plessey v. Ferguson* "separate but equal" decision (Allen & Jewell, 2002). Ultimately, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 declared segregation as unconstitutional and in theory was abolished. The Civil Rights Act was significant because it prohibited segregated educational institutions from receiving federal funding. Despite the court rulings, institution that were made up of Caucasian students, were extremely slow to desegregate (Prat, 2002).

In the decades that followed the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling, African Americans made noticeable progress in higher education access and degree attainment (Allen & Jewell, 2002). In 1977, African

Americans earned roughly 58,000 bachelor's degrees (Allen & Jewell, 2002).

The access and degree attainment would continue into the 90s.

However, in 1994, the figures rose to over 83,000 (Dyke, 2009). The almost 45% increase in African American student enrollment and degree attainment can be attributed to several factors during this period (An, 2012). The factors consisted of federal governmental intervention, a slight easing of racial tensions and violence, persistence of African Americans to struggle for education and an American economy that was so robust that racist Americans tended to have less fear of educational attainment of African Americans (Polite & Davis, 1999; Ross, 1998).

African Americans have been at the forefront of the fight for equal opportunity in education in the United States. The current political climate suggests that the fight continues. African Americans continue to face tremendous odds in their efforts to be fully included in the educational opportunities afforded all Americans. The founding principles and practices of the educational system in this country fundamentally excluded African Americans. The United States cannot afford to affirm those past exclusionary principles (Rome, 2001). Institutions must develop and commit to bold strategies to increase African Americans participation and success in higher education, through its campus retention programs. The CWCP is just one attempt to support the educational attainment of students through its offered services. It is not only important for the

future opportunities of African Americans and other underrepresented groups; it is important for the overall prosperity of the United States (National Academy of Science, 2012). Given that future educational opportunities for African Americans and other underrepresented students have been falling behind, it is important to see program that support African American male educational attainment such as CWCP.

Factors Affecting African American Males in Education

Most college students struggle with developmental issues and stressors related to transitioning into a new environment (Pendleton, 2007). They also find finances, coursework, and self-identity to be challenging. These issues are particularly aggravating within the African American male college student population at a university. African American male students report experiencing condescension, isolation, invisibility, and super visibility. They also report pervasive feelings of discomfort, frustration, and exhaustion. More troubling, African American males tend to deny mental health issues and to be reluctant to seek mental health services (Davis et al., 2004; Grier-Reed, 2010; Solorzano, Seja, & Yosso, 2000; Watkins, Green, Goodson, & Guidry, 2007).

Campus Environment

Accommodating African American male students by providing environments which encourage social involvement, as well as academic

enrichment, could enhance the college experience among African American males (Davis, 1995; Taylor & Olswang, 1997). Acknowledging the social component of the individual's life and exploring opportunities to create a comfortable social and intellectual environment probably allow students to flourish. When these conditions are present, research suggests that African American men adjust well to college environments, exhibiting higher levels of self-esteem and ambition; cultural pride and determination (Griffin et al., 2010; Taylor & Olswang, 1997).

Although African American males are capable of assimilating into the college environment, those attending predominately Caucasian institutions report less congruency between their pre-college high school/community life and their collegiate experiences. By contrast, African American males attending historically African American colleges or universities describe their social environment as warm and welcoming and more congruent with their pre-college environments. Thus, the colleges' ability to provide an environment which encourages learning, but embraces social welfare, is paramount (Brock, 2010).

Financial barriers

Financing a college education has been an issue for many students in higher education, especially when institutions are increasing tuition costs and fees but not increasing student need-based aid. When students select a college, one of the primary factors is cost (Jones, 2002). The price of attending college has risen dramatically. To offset reductions in state funding, public universities have

increased their tuition fees, placing the burden on the middle-income and low-income students who can least afford it. From 1980 to 2011, college tuition increased by 244% (Naylor, 2015), which has reduced college opportunity for middle- and low-income students. Despite the fact that state university enrollment accounts for over 70% of all college students, these universities' budgets continue to decrease. After the 2008 financial crisis, there were severe budget cuts from state and local governments. From 2007 to 2012, public funding decreased by 23% on average per full-time-equivalent student (Blumenstyk, 2015). In addition, Pell Grants have not kept up with tuition increases. In 1970, Pell Grants covered 80% of college costs; today they cover only 31%, making it more difficult for low income and minority students to afford college (College Board, 2015).

The burden of financing education is cumbersome and can deter some students from pursuing advanced degrees. African American males identified financial aid as a main factor in determining their college of choice (Cho, Hudley, Lee, Barry, & Kelly, 2008; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009). It is safe to assume that financial aid is imperative for individuals with few, if any, financial resources. Individuals with pecuniary difficulties rely heavily on the availability of funds from financial aid. Financial constraints are also present among African Americans in pursuit of doctoral degrees. Such underrepresentation has cascading effects whereby African American faculty mentors are fewer in number

and are subsequently less available to mentor or serve as role models for African American students (Bailey, 2017). The underrepresentation of African American students and African American faculty members in the United States probably reflects the lack of funding available to academically and intellectually capable students (Garcia, 1980).

Students who depend on financial aid are from low-income and or first-generation students. African American male students who attend college are more likely to be first-generation college students coming from low-income households (Fischer, 2007). Student loans seem to be the main source of aid available, but because of students of color low financial literacy, many African American males are reluctant to borrow the loans offered from the institution (Heller, 2001). Due to lack of financial aid, African American males are more likely to withdraw from an institution or attend a less expensive university due to unmet aid (Harper, 2012). Students who decide to continue may be forced to work part-time off campus to afford tuition expenses, which prolongs degree completion.

Parental involvement

In addition to financing and education, the relationship between college students and their families, and in turn, between families and institutions, can affect degree attainment (Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2015). Parental involvement and social support play a strong role in African American

males' performance in college (Minke, & Sheridan & Kim & Ryoo & Koziol, 2014).

The issues students encounter outside the classroom can greatly affect their academic performance and influence their decision to continue to graduation. Evidence suggests students who are first-generation college students from low socioeconomic backgrounds encounter lower levels of family support, lower levels of college expectations, and less knowledge of the campus environment and values among parents (McConnell, 2000). In contrast, parents who earned college degrees are more likely to promote the value of education and provide their children with resources to prepare students prior to entering college (Baum, Ma & Payea, 2013). Research shows the more academically prepared students are, the more likely they are to succeed at a college institution. For African American males, many studies found family support and involvement are a major indicator of their educational attainment. Parental involvement and support is essential in helping African American male students face the social, cultural, and academic challenges they may encounter at a higher-education institution (Baum et al., 2013).

Trends of African Americans in Higher Education

The available research indicates that strong relationships with faculty are a crucial tool to educational attainment of students in higher education (Astin, 1999). Although relationships with faculty are important to the success of students of color, research also indicates that African American students are often unable to form strong relationships with faculty at predominately Caucasian institutions (Fleming, 1984). One reason is that African American students often perceive Caucasian faculty as culturally insensitive (Guiffrida, 2006). Examples of cultural insensitivity on the part of Caucasian faculty include making stereotypical comments about African Americans, generalizing students' opinions in class as representing those of all African Americans, and failing to acknowledge and incorporate African American perspective into their curricula (Guiffrida, 2006). This explains why many African Americans are more comfortable and willing to seek academic help from family, friends, or academic advisors who are minorities of color than from Caucasian faculty (Guiffrida, 2006).

However, Guiffrida (2006) has also found that there is much more to successful African American student/faculty relationships than simply finding faculty who avoid stereotyping and incorporate diversity into their curricula. In a qualitative study with over-achieving African American students, Guiffrida (2006) found that students perceived African American faculty as much more

willing than Caucasian faculty to go above and beyond to assist students in succeeding at college by providing students with comprehensive academic, career, and personal advising; actively supporting and advocating for students at college and at home; and demonstrating beliefs in students' academic abilities. While students also perceived supportive relationships with Caucasian faculty, they perceived Caucasian faculty as much less willing to go above and beyond their roles as teachers and academic advisers to assist them in their college success.

Rationale for the Study

African American males face challenges along the entire educational pipeline to degree attainment. Exploring factors and challenges related to African American male academic success is important. Inequitable educational experiences appear to exist at and beyond the undergraduate level, thus potentially impeding African American male matriculation through higher education, and particularly through master's and doctoral programs (Garcia, 1980). As a practical and unfortunate matter, the underrepresentation of African American males in a higher educational setting practically reduces positive mentoring opportunities, and may perpetuate deeply ingrained beliefs of inferiority, grounded within pseudoscience and historical accounts of the past (Asim, 2007). This researcher provides valuable information to educators by providing a study

with first-hand accounts from students who have persisted through a retention program. The CWCP supported students by providing them with a retention program that supported a holistic, cultural learning experience.

Summary

The literature review highlights three theoretical framework: Social Integration Theory, African American Male Theory, and Transformational Leadership. The literature also points out and illustrates the history of African American in education and the factors affecting their educational attainment. The literature review has produced a common theme: African American males are struggling to obtain a college degree and there are not enough programs that have the representation to support them. This study focuses on the African American male students of the CWCP who successfully graduated and obtain a college degree. Specifically, this study seeks to identify and understand influences on their successful journey so that other students and educators can be inspired to graduate from a four-year institution.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the impact of the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program on the educational attainment of African American males in a 4-year institution. By understanding the challenges African males face, the impact of the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program, and the role of service learning in education, the researcher hopes that effective intervention, enrichment, and educational support can be created to support African American male students. Interview data collected from the 10 African American male students who participated in a 45-minute focus group interview was analyzed using the grouping of common themes the researcher found. The focus group took place during Spring 2016 on a school campus in Elk Grove, Ca. This chapter includes information about setting, population and sample, design, data collection, instrumentation, data analysis procedures, and limitations of the study.

Research Design

Setting of the Study

The site for this study was California State University, Sacramento (Sacramento State). Sacramento State is located on over 5,000 acres in a rural college town and is one of 23 campuses in its system. Sacramento State plays a major role in the social and cultural life of the city. With over 30,000 students, this University has a reputation as an excellent teaching institution, offering studies in more than 100 fields including the agricultural and biological sciences, arts and humanities, and engineering. The campus has a student enrollment of over 24,500 undergraduate students. The ethnic breakdown of the student body is as follows:

Table 1

Student Demographics California State University, Sacramento, 2015

| Ethnicity | % |
|------------------|-----|
| Asian | 20% |
| White/Caucasian | 30% |
| Hispanic | 28% |
| African American | 6% |
| Other/Unknown | 12% |

Population and Sample

The population for this study was graduated African American male students who had been in the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program at Sacramento State. The sample chosen for this study was 10 African American male students in the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program at Sacramento State. Purposive sampling was used, which involves selecting study participants based on specified criteria essential for a thorough analysis of the topic (Merriam, 2002). Students self-selected to participate in the study; interested students contacted the primary researcher by responding via e-mail. Due to the sample size being relatively small, it is not expected, nor intended that the sample will be representative of the African American male campus population. Qualitative research seeks to gain a relatively in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of these male participants as opposed to having the ability to generalize those experiences and perspectives to the entire African American male population.

Design of the Study

This study used a semi-structured open-ended focus group interview process to facilitate discussion about the experiences of first-year African American male freshmen undergraduate students' pathways to this Northern California public university (see Appendix A). A qualitative study using an

interview format was used to determine salient themes. Greenbaum (1997) suggested, “researchers who use qualitative methods seek a deeper truth. Qualitative methods aim to make sense of, interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them” (p. 120). The researcher employed a participatory research methodology to address the research questions since this method afforded a process of listening to, exploring, and engaging in dialogue voices that had historically not been heard, voices and perspectives that are missing from so much of the research (Armstrong & Moore, 2004). Armstrong and Moore (2004) wrote, “participatory research allows the researcher and the participant to be co-researchers, in a collaborative relationship, with each bringing his knowledge to the research table” (p. 48). The dialogues were conducted in an effort to construct a body of research that takes into consideration the efforts of the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement African American male graduates.

Data Collection

In accordance with Sacramento State’s institutional review process, the researcher completed the necessary forms, submitted, and was approved to begin the study. The researcher contacted the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program for assistance in making contact with African American male students who might be interested in participating in the study. The primary researcher asked the program representative for a contact list of the students who graduated from the program and e-mailed a consent letter to the participants and a request to

arrange a group interview (see Appendix B). Participants signed the consent waiver before the interview began.

A digital recorder was used to record interviews and field notes were taken. Each participant had a copy of the interview questions in front of him. The researcher asked follow-up questions that sought clarity and additional information based on the participants' responses to the interview questions. The researcher transcribed responses that related directly to the research questions or were emphasized by the participants as being significant their academic success.

Instrumentation

The interviews focused on the following areas of inquiry:

1. What challenges do African American males face in higher education regarding graduation persistence?
2. How does the Cooper-Woodson College program promote persistence and graduation for African American males?
3. How does the Cooper-Woodson College program impact student development through service learning?

Data Analysis Procedures

The intent of this study was to gather and analyze data to determine the experiences of graduated African American male students who were in the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program. The process of qualitative data analysis involved the comprehensive search for general statements and themes

that connect the themes selected by the researcher. Consistent findings were clustered into thematic labels to reveal the core themes of the experience. The researcher developed categories by looking for recurrent themes in the interview logs. Responses from the 10 students who participated in this research focused on four important themes that participants considered important to their academic success. The themes were: (a) challenges the students faced in regards to degree attainment, (b) African American student and faculty representation in classes, (c) faculty and student relationships and support and (d) meaningful service learning.

Limitations of the Study

All studies have some limitations, and researchers should be honest about these limitations and how they affect the results of the study. The researcher of this study identified two limitations. First, this study focused on African American males at one Northern California Public Institution. Focusing on a relatively small participant and institutional sample size of one ethnicity, one gender, and one campus can limit the ability to generalize the results. Another limitation to this study was that the perceptions of the participants were exclusively from students attending a predominantly White institution. Perceptions of participants who attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities may differ from those at predominantly White institutions.

Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine African American males' educational attainment by evaluating the impact of the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program (CWCP) at Sacramento State. The study explored challenges African American males in higher education face regarding degree attainment and student involvement through service learning initiatives of the program. The following research questions guided the study:

This study addressed the following questions:

1. What challenges do African American males face in higher education regarding graduation persistence?
2. How does the Cooper-Woodson College program promote persistence and graduation for African American males?
3. How does the Cooper-Woodson College program impact student development through service learning?

This chapter reviews the results from the interview and concludes with a discussion of the findings. The results begin with research participants' demographic information. Data from the transcribed interviewed are presented in

order of the research question, followed by the themes that emerged outside of the proposed research questions.

Table 1 shows the following demographic information for the research participants in this study: Home City (City of residence prior to attending college), whether the student was first-generation college-going, the year the participant graduated from college, and the participant's college major.

Participants are referred to as *Participant #*number to protect the identity of the students involved in this study.

Table 2

Demographic Information for Research Participants

| Participant | Home City | First Generation | College Major | Year Graduated |
|-------------|----------------|---------------------|---|-------------------|
| #1 | Richmond | Yes | Sociology | 2008 |
| #2 | Elk Grove | Yes | Kinesiology | 2008 |
| #3 | San Leandro | No | Electrical & Electronic Engineering | 2008 |
| #4 | Sacramento | No | Sociology/ African American Studies | 2009 |
| #5 | Oakland | Yes | Business | 2010 |
| #6 | Vacaville | Yes | Criminal Justice | 2011 |
| #7 | Sacramento | Yes | Criminal Justice | 2013 |

| | | | | |
|-----|------------|-----|---|------|
| #8 | Pittsburg | No | Sociology/ African American Studies | 2013 |
| #9 | Sacramento | Yes | Business | 2015 |
| #10 | Elk Grove | Yes | Criminal Justice | 2016 |

Interview Results

The findings from the interview with 10 African American males are presented in this chapter. The lived experiences of these participants while involved with the CWCP demonstrate factors that have supported their academic persistence to degree attainment. The key findings of this research include the challenges African American males faced in higher education, the relationships amongst students and faculty in the CWCP, and the positive impact of service learning on African American males.

Challenges of African American Male Students

The interviews revealed that many of the participants had encountered substantial obstacles before actually enrolling in college. Beginning at the age of seven, participant #2 had moved many times from one location to the next. The participant also shared:

I don't know. I guess you could say that there are some people out there that would say the events I went through were traumatic, but everyone has

life challenges and we just have to keep moving forward. You just have to take the challenges and use them to your advantage.

Participant #2 presents the idea of resiliency. The ongoing challenges presented are moments the participant has taken and grown from. The student has become immune to events that are considered obstacles and or traumatic to others. He has learned to persist through challenging moments in his life, building resiliency.

In addition to resiliency, participants looked at education as an escape or a pathway out of dangerous situations. Many of the participants shared that they always "knew" they would attend college. All of them, further revealed that this idea evolved consciously or subconsciously because of the expectations of their families. Specifically, four of the respondents, felt college would be a key to escaping a lifestyle or their neighborhood, or a personal desire for success (all participants). Participant #4 stated, "It was innate. Had been pushed in my family. I knew college was something I had to do. No one had to say anything."

Respondents of the study shared how their neighborhood was a motivator to obtain higher education opportunities. Participant #5 shared with the focus group his background experience with his neighborhood: "I did not live in the best neighborhood; there was a lot of violence and gangs. Seeing myself attending college was my motivation to get out of the rough neighborhood."

Once the students were accepted to the university, placement testing was necessary. Entry Level Math/ English Placement Test (ELM/EPT) was included with family pressures and challenges. The California State University system requires that all undergraduate students, except those who qualify for an exemption, take the CSU Entry Level Mathematics (ELM) examination and the CSU English Placement Test (EPT). These examinations are designed to identify if a student is “college ready” in Math and English. Undergraduate students who do not pass these tests are placed in appropriate remedial classes during the first term of their enrollment. Students placed in remedial programs in either English or mathematics must complete all remediation in their first year of enrollment or the student will be released from the institution. Participants #2, #6, #7, and #8 felt these tests were “ridiculous. They made me feel dumb.” The same participants felt the tests “were a waste of time to take and had bad timing.” Participant #7 had to take their exams on date of the senior prom. “I didn’t understand the seriousness of the test. I just wanted to get to prom” (Participant #7). Referring to the demographic chart, the researcher found it interesting Participant #7 was a first generation student. This is an interesting observation because there was one before him in his family who had gone into higher education to provide the participant with feedback on the seriousness of the test. Based on this, it is understandable why he did not understand the serious of the assessment.

Once the semester started, the students who did not pass were put in remedial classes, and many of them shared the feeling of “being dumb.”

Participant #2 shared:

The remedial classes really set me back. I felt so discouraged I just stopped showing up. The professor then reached out to me and asked why I wasn't showing up. The professor was an African American male as well. I told him I just felt stupid in there. I honestly feel like these tests are the reason people are dropping out. I just felt throughout that first year, a real lack of student support from the campus until I joined Cooper-Woodson.

According to Participant #2, remedial classes and testing are systemic barriers to educational attainment. Executive Order 665 came into effect beginning in the Fall 1998 semester (Executive Orders, CSU, 2016). It is a requirement from the Chancellor's Office that states first-time freshmen must complete all developmental mathematics and writing courses within the first year of enrollment or they will have to drop out from the university of attendance. In the participant's response, the African American male faculty member was working to develop a critical consciousness among both students and faculty to challenge inequities, such as remediation, in the larger society.

One of the universal problems for all the participants was access to classes. “It was definitely a struggle getting classes you needed to get in and get

out” (Participant #10). They all agreed that if more classes were offered for their major courses they might have been able to make out sooner with their degrees. Many of them took other GE courses that were taught by professors in the Ethnic Studies department, which was connected to CWCP.

Faculty and Student Relationships in the CWCP

Students and faculty relationships was a common reoccurring theme of the focus group. Participants shared the positive impact the CWCP faculty had on their degree attainment. Participant #10 shared the impact of having an African American professor:

At first, I did not know how I would do in the Pan African Studies class, but it really grew on me and it even made me add to my degree. Also, it really helped me, and I don’t know if I am speaking for everyone, that my professor was African American.

After this issue of African American representation was raised, Participant #8 contributed by adding: “Yes, I agree. At first it really didn’t bother me, but as I looked around in those classes I was also the token of the lecture hall. If I was absent or late, everyone knew because I stuck out.”

Participate #8 refers to the social construction of tokenism. the student was not there; the class knew because he was the only African American student in the class.

After Participant #8 had shared his dissatisfaction of inclusion and representation, Participant #9 expressed his satisfaction with his relationships with faculty of CWCP:

What was so cool about Cooper-Woodson was that the faculty cared and reached out. If I missed a class, Dr. Mosupyoe would call me and check in on me to see what was the reason for me missing class. This was the same for other professors in Cooper-Woodson. They treated us like family and helped us get through.

The common theme of “family” within the program reoccurred. The theme was present when participants of the study were presented with questions that required them to talk about their experiences dealing with faculty. The feeling of inclusion and cultural representation the faculty presented to the students was a contributing factor in the students persisting because they had a support system of mentors and support. Nine of the ten participants mentioned the faculty and staff playing a strong role in supporting their academic success throughout their time in the CWCP. Participant #2 expressed:

Dr. Mosupyoe (Director of Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program and Professor) challenged us to look at things from different perspectives. She told me to look deeper into literature and not always accept everything that is presented to us. For example, the terms slave and enslavement. People use these terms interchangeably, but they are very

different. If you think about it, by simply changing from the use of a name, slaves, to an adjective, enslaved, we grant these individuals an identity as people and use a term to describe their position in society rather than reducing them to that position. In a small but important way, we carry them forward as people, not the property that they were in that time. Language is power.

Dr. Mosupyoe's ability to have the students conceptually think about what they were learning allowed for the students to have a deeper, cultural connection to what they were learning. Dr. Mosupyoe was a transformative educator that created an inclusive learning environment. The family connection the CWCP had a positive effect on students' educational attainment.

Integration of Cooper-Woodson Students

In addition to family the family structure of the program, the representation of African American faculty was apparent to participants. Participants #3, #4, and #5 all mentioned how "having a black teacher that motivated and included me in my learning really helped me" graduate. After the participants discussed the topics of representation of black staff and a sense of belonging in the program, Participant #10 began to talk about the mentorship opportunities:

The whole program had a close relationship with the students who were involved and the community. It was really nice seeing this because it

motivated me to give more back to my community and other who are going through the same struggles as I was going through.

The cultural and racial representation for the students gave them a resource they could go to for support. The faculty assisted the students in providing the students opportunities to network with individuals from the community. The outreach from the CWCP provided the students with a resource that was targeted for their growth both academically and culturally. Having the students have a model of success made their goal visible and possible.

Finding Strength in Community and Culture through Service Learning

The majority of the participants consistently expressed that having cultural pride and a strong sense of who they are as African American men helped them succeed academically. The ability to understand and deal with racism is very helpful for African American students trying to navigate the educational system. Often times, issues of culture, race, and racism mediate how African Americans learn to navigate a system and how others in the system react to them (Steele & Hilliard, 2003). The awareness of these factors empowers students to understand how to best access resources and support for academic success. Participant #2 was adamant in saying, "I made a promise to myself not to fall into the negative stereotypes about African American males. I wanted to make a difference." As stated in the literature of the history of African American males in education, African Americans have been portrayed from deficit model in education. The

respondent was aware of this image and wanted to persist and give back his community. This idea of community prompted participant #4 to add:

The service learning opportunities gave me an opportunity to mentor and tutor other students from my local high school. Once I started this service, I wanted to stay involved and do more if I could for the students and community.

The service learning opportunities presented to the students allowed them to become more involved in their community. This was part of the requirements to remain a part of the program. Three of the participants felt it was “a great way to give back. I wanted to give back more once I started. It was definitely a culture shock.” For the participants, the “culture shock,” or the uncomfortable feeling of uncertainty when immersed in unfamiliar surroundings, happens because many of them had never done meaningful service learning and felt what they were doing was making a difference in their communities (Participants #2, #5, #6). Also, what made this service learning experience unique is the community involvement and dedication to the program. Participant #10 stated, “We just didn’t go to the community, the community came to us. The program pushed us to serve and to understand why we serve.”

The following responses from Participants #2, #7, #1, #5, and #9 suggested that service learning aided in the development of the students:

- Seeing others in the struggle made me want to do something bigger to help them
- It was crazy seeing what I was learning in my sociology classes in person.
- The community members they brought to campus were a nice reminder that we all started from somewhere.
- I enjoyed giving back to my community.
- The selfless act of this service learning brought my education full circle. Feels right to do the right thing.

Other Factors

Parental Support to Higher Education

A significant theme that emerged outside the proposed research questions was the common theme of parental support contributing to the participants' academic success. College is often perceived as an opportunity to change a family's economic circumstances and lifestyle. Seven participants, who were first-generation college students, shared their families' low socioeconomic status as a strong motivator for pursuing higher education. The seven participants all commented on the process of getting into college. For their families, many of them had never gone to college. Participant #10 said, "My mom knew she could not support me financially, so she helped me apply for scholarships before I

entered college and for the Cooper-Woodson program.” Furthermore, parents were aware of the financial responsibility of college but were classified as coming from a low socioeconomic status. Participant #2’s parents did not know how to help him with the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). The respondent had to utilize other resources to complete the application. The respondent was in a program called AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) and there were Cash for College workshops at his high school that helped him with the process. Applying for higher education is a process. This was articulated by the majority of the respondents. It is even more a challenge if the student is a first-generation college bound student: “When you are a first-generation college student, many of the things you go through, no one in your family has” (Participant #1).

Discussion

This study allowed for an examination of challenges African American male students face in higher education, persistence efforts by faculty through built relationships, and service learning opportunities of the CWCP that lead to the academic persistence from the perspectives of 10 African American male participants. The qualitative data provide some perspectives on their experiences while they were involved in the CWCP and how it supported their academic

success. The perspectives affirm and dispel some of the notions that pertain to African American males and educational attainment.

Studies about African American males present statistics of low degree achievement and academic success. Thus, the researcher wanted to know, from African American males students who had graduated from the CWCP, what factors of the program contributed to their degree completion. All 10 participants responded that the professors and faculty, the community service opportunities, and community within the CWCP had a positive influence on their persistence. The following responses to this question summarized what these African American males gained from the program and wanted other African American male students to know about CWCP:

- College is not easy, especially being a man of color. I highly recommend this program to other students for the support.
- I definitely found my second family through those years involved.
- The Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement program allowed for me to feel included in my classroom lectures.
- The faculty always pushed us and supported us in any way they could.
- The community service created growth and allowed for me to give back.
- I found strong mentors in this program.

- I still keep in touch with all the classmates I met in The Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement program.
- I learned to be open to change.
- Dr. Mosupyoe was like a mother to us and always wanted the best in us to show.
- The Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement program provided me hope. Seeing other successful African American males doing great things made me work even harder to graduate and make it.

Although qualitative research does not purport to generalize, the findings of this study may offer implications that can be considered in a variety of educational institutions. For all educators, this overview suggests a new framework from which to evaluate what is currently being done to promote educational attainment for African American males and other underrepresented populations. Perhaps most importantly, the family members, faculty, staff, and other advocates of young African American males can be informed of the critical points of intervention that may influence future possibilities for these students.

Summary of Findings

Chapter 4 presented the findings of the study. The findings were analyzed and groups by themes from the interviews of 10 African American male graduates of the CWCP at California State University, Sacramento. The themes were: (a)

challenges the students faced in regard to degree attainment, (b) African American student and faculty representation in classes, (c) faculty and student relationships and support and (d) meaningful service learning.

Students in the CWCP were “brought together and allowed to share their stories with one another” (Participant #1). Once the participants had made it into the university and CWCP, they felt they were included in their education and were supported by the faculty: “The faculty always pushed us and supported us in any way they could.” Throughout the student’s educational attainment, they felt the scholarships very were helpful, especially paying for books. Having this option in the program helped the students overcome financial barriers. Participant #4 said they “could always go to the faculty for support.” There was an instance, when the student has missed a day of class. The faculty reached out to them to check on student to see if they were ok and to see if there was anything they could do to help the student. The faculty were like parents to students of the program. The CWCP offered meaningful service learning. Participant #4 stated, “The selfless act of this service learning brought my education full circle. Feels right to do the right thing.” All the participants had a different pathway to college. Students came from homes where there was no motivation in their neighborhood to go college (Participant #5) or they were first-generation with no parents who had gone to college. The findings of this research suggest that students of the

CWCP come from families with no college experience and are supported through integration and positive relationships with faculty.

Summary

In summary, participants of this study shared narratives of the CWCP. The narratives were based around the challenges African American male students faced in regards to degree attainment, the student and faculty representation and relationships in the program, and the impact of meaningful service learning while obtaining a college degree. The 10 participants of the CWCP were able to earn a college degree because of the support they had from the faculty and staff. More than half of the participants of this study were first generation college students and had to learn how navigate the higher education system. The faculty and staff were able to provide support to these students through mentorship and service learning that helped to support their educational experiences.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

African American males in education have consistently been studied from a deficit model perspective, primarily focusing on the negative aspects, such as low college degree attainment (Bell, 2014). Furthermore, they are blamed for their hardships, struggles, and low academic achievement. Although this research approach has laid the foundation for studying African American males, this study can provide a different perspective by which researchers can examine African American male student retention from a different, more positive perspective, a perspective of success. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the educational attainment of African American males who had graduated from the CWCP at Sacramento State University.

In regard to the challenges African American males face affecting graduation persistence, remediation courses were a contributing factor. Respondents shared a sense of “being dumb” and discouraged to the point they stopped showing up to classes. In addition to remediation, respondents felt there was not enough representation of their culture being reflected in the classroom. Respondents were not taught by African Americans, nor were there other African American males in their General Education Classes. The CWCP supported the

respondents by providing them with rigor in their coursework and representation of culture in the faculty and staff. The respondents of this study said they found the material they were learning to be important and interesting tool. Also, the mentorship opportunities by the faculty of the CWCP provided to the students allowed them to meet and learn from professionals in their field of study. The service learning opportunities presented to respondents allowed for them develop strong civic engagement skills. The participants had the chance to work with community members which enhanced their group, organizational and interpersonal skills. Most importantly, the researcher found that the respondents also gained important experience working with diverse members of their communities.

The participants in the study shared the common theme of family in their experiences and opinions about what they felt to be most important to their educational attainment and how the CWCP pushed them to overcome obstacles to gain experience in academic success at an institution of higher education.

Conclusions

There is a need for society to recognize that African Americans males are intelligent, hardworking, and productive members of society and that all citizens regardless of race or nationality should be given an equal opportunity to pursue a college degree in a welcoming and nurturing environment. The African American

male alumni of the CWCP in this study were academically successful despite their struggles and hardships they had to overcome. Responses from the 10 students who participated in this research were consistent with this finding. All the participants had the presence of at least one faculty member of the same race/ethnicity who conveyed compassion and gave support and encouragement. They also had opportunities to participate in service learning that shaped their educational experience and personal growth. While the African American males of this study faced many challenges throughout their educational attainment, the community built within the CWCP helped promote their degree completion.

Based on the presented study, African American males are facing problems in higher education that are affecting degree attainment. Respondents of the study reported having a problem with remediation classes. Students were put in these classes for not scoring a specific score. The classes the students were placed in were simply credit or no credit. This caused students to pay for classes where they earned no college units, simply credit. These classes also made the students feel less than or not college ready. In addition to remediation classes, students experienced a problem with representation in their GE courses. Most of their classes were taught by teachers that did not look like them and/or did not come from the same cultural capital. This was a problem for the students because they felt it became harder for them to relate to the teacher and the material.

The CWCP promotes graduation persistence through faculty and student relationships. The faculty provided the students with mentorship and relationships that supported their degree attainment. The role of professors in supporting the academic success of African American males was significant and aided to degree attainment, according to the participants of the study. The available literature acknowledges the impact an educator can play in the academic success of students (Wood & Newman, 2017). Low-income and minority students often experience teachers who are not culturally competent, have low expectations of the students, and have the least teaching experience. Also, other faculty and staff were seen as playing a significant role in the participants' educational success. Faculty and student interactions and relationships are important both inside the classroom and in more informal settings. Faculty of CWCP seek to engage with students around their career interest and try to help students make connections to their intrinsic interest in the subject matter and the course materials. CWCP has done this by ensuring that course content is presented in a socio-cultural relevant manner that addresses the life opportunities and challenges faced by African American males. Thus, it is important to create opportunities for these types of connections early on in the academic careers of African American males (Price & Tovar, 2014).

The perspectives shared by the academically successful African American males in this study emphasized the importance of a positive, representative

community that supports students of color and the tremendous influence this can have on African American male student success. These participants expressed confidence in themselves and their abilities because they were able to depend on significant support throughout their academic experience. The African American males in this study were academically successful despite having to overcome obstacles throughout their educational experience. Findings from the interviews of the 10 African American male graduates focused on the impact of the CWCP and sought to identify influences of the program that contributed to their successful journey to completing their degrees. The findings of this study are significant because this study provides responses from African American males who have successfully obtained a degree through a program that provided students with a culturally responsive approach to education. The students of the program had strong mentorship and relationships from the faculty. Having strong support from a program's faculty, such as CWCP, provides students a resource they could rely and obtain mentorship. This was important, especially to the participants who were first-generation. Students who are first-generation do not have a modeled example from home to refer to on navigating higher education.

Participants in this study demonstrated positive outcomes when they participated in service learning. Collectively, the findings of this research demonstrated that students who engage in service-learning opportunities had positive outcomes related to educational attainment and developed a deeper

understanding of course content. Participation in service learning experiences was also associated with other indicators of positive student engagement. This included the ability to apply the course concepts to real world scenarios and demonstration of critical thinking skills. The meaningful service learning opportunities allowed students to become involved in the community while obtaining their degree. The researcher found this theme significant because the service learning provided the students with leadership opportunities to get involved in the community and grow as a student.

This study revealed that the African American male participants experienced challenges obtaining higher education because guardians were not fully aware of the requirements, processes, or expectations of college enrollment. The literature says, however, that college choice and transition is a complex, culturally bound process (Freeman, 2005). In addition to this challenge, students were faced with remediation classes and this caused students to feel not college ready. The study also revealed the positive impact of faculty and student relationships; especially a faculty that mirrors the student population being served.

Recommendations

The statement has been said time and time again, “There are more African American men in prison than in or colleges and universities.” For nearly a

decade, this statement has been popular with those attempting to dramatize the plight of African American males. It is crucial that African Americans excel in education to disprove the myths and stereotypes (e.g., being lazy, criminal, anti-intellectual, not valuing an education) that are prevalent in society (Davis, 2004; Gray, 2001).

Exploring factors related to African American male academic success is important. As Participant #4, says, “College is not easy, especially being a man of color.” Inequitable educational experiences appear to exist at and beyond the undergraduate level, thus potentially impeding African American male matriculation through higher education, and particularly through master’s and doctoral programs (Garcia, 1980). The establishment of a retention program designed specifically for African American male students can enhance their career and professional development, self-esteem, academic and social skills, and increase their likelihood of obtaining college degrees. This study has helped to build the field by providing the voices and stories from 10 African American males who successfully completed a college degree with the support of a culturally responsive retention program. The CWCP was aware of the achievement gap of African Americans in education, specifically African American males. The program addresses this problem by providing students with the opportunity to grow from challenges, such as remediation, build support systems with staff, and become involved in service learning. This is important to

the study and the future because through Tinto's Student Integration theory (1993), students who become a part of their campus academically and socially are more likely to stay on track to graduate with a college degree.

In addition, institutions must remember that African American male students need a warm, supportive, and nurturing environment to facilitate their long-term success (LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997). To effectively increase retention among African American male college students, additional minority faculty is needed to serve as mentors. Mentoring programs can also increase the likelihood that African American male students will successfully transfer to 4-year universities. The establishment of a mentoring program for African American males can increase human capital by providing more African American men with the skills, tools, and resources needed to be a productive citizen. Without a college degree, the career choices and possibilities are extremely limited (Cuyjet, 1997). If systems of higher education do not establish more mentoring programs that support male students of color, future facets such as career readiness, diversity in the workplace, and graduation rates will decline.

Recommendations for Future Research

In the field of educational research, there is a need for more qualitative studies highlighting the academic success of African American males and students of color, in general. This study presented the positive impact the CWCP had on African American males in their own words. Respondents presented the

common themes of challenges they faced, the effects of having African American faculty, and the impact of participating in service learning. CWCP is significant because this program is the only of its kind. This includes having African Americans teaching a majority of the courses offered. Respondents of this study said they felt comfortable and included in their learning having been taught by someone who looks like them. In addition to the courses being taught, the mentorship provided to the students helped the students persist because they had someone they could go to for support they felt comfortable with. For future research, a qualitative study that compared retention programs on campus would be another opportunity to interview African American and other male students of color graduates. Most importantly, the study could look at the relationships the students had with their faculty and see if this helped the student persist to degree attainment. The researcher could have a focus group to examine common themes of successful initiatives that support students and compare these results to the initiatives of CWCP. Such a study would be beneficial in confirming or disaffirming the findings of this study.

The researcher hopes this study has opened the minds of people who have the will and the power to create more resources, such as the CWCP, for African American males to succeed academically in higher education. However, the researcher believes that African American males and their families must also take some responsibility to *reframe the issues* to identify their own needs and wants.

The voices of the African American male participants who generously shared their stories for this study have allowed for an increased understanding of the opportunities and challenges on the path toward higher education.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

1. After reading the consent form, do you agree to participate? (Participant signs form)
2. Please describe your background (where you grew up, your schooling, your family)
3. What made you decide to join the Cooper Woodson College Enhancement program?
4. Describe the rigor of the courses offered in the program.
5. Describe your faculty
6. Describe your community service opportunities in the program.
7. What have been some challenges you have faced while in college?
8. In what ways has the Cooper Woodson College Enhancement influenced you to be more involved in campus activities, programs or services?
9. What has influenced you the most to persist to graduate?
10. Describe the resources/support the Cooper Woodson College Enhancement provided that you believe were significant to your academic success.
11. Has the Cooper Woodson College Enhancement program made your journey from high school to college smoother?
12. Would you recommend the Cooper Woodson College Enhancement program to other students? (If yes or no, can you explain your answer with examples?)
13. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you think is important to include in this interview?

APPENDIX B

Consent Letter

My name is Marvin Reed and I work for California State University, Sacramento as a Project Specialist for the Division of Student Affairs. I am also a graduate student with the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at California State University, Sacramento. I am conducting a study on the impact of the Cooper Woodson College Enhancement program on African American male students' persistence in college.

In order to accomplish this, I need to identify a few students who are interested in investing their time and reflecting on their educational experiences via interview. The interviews will be conducted individually and will be recorded to assist the researcher in analyzing the experiences. The recordings will be destroyed at the end of the research project and will not be shared with anyone. Your participation includes an interview on the components of the Cooper Woodson College Enhancement program, challenges you have encountered in higher education, and resources or services that you believe contributed to your academic success. The findings of all the interviews will be analyzed and compared for the purpose of enhancing student experiences. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes, and will be conducted at your convenience and on campus. Your anonymity will be protected and the process does not pose any risk of harm to the participants whatsoever.

While you may not personally benefit from participating in this research, your reflections about your experiences will, however, add to the growing body of research about the educational barriers and successes of African American males in higher education.

Furthermore, any data interpretation and published research report will utilize pseudonyms or refer to respondents in non-identifying terms; such as "the respondent" or "the student." Thus fully preserving your anonymity and privacy.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may decline participation in this study without any consequences at any point. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to participate in the research.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Marvin Reed at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED] or Dr. Chavez at (916) 278-5221 or Chavez@csus.edu or the Institutional Review Board (IRB) office at (916) 278-5674 or leah.vargas@csus.edu. Thank you for your critical support in this research.

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