There are a limited number of qualitative research studies, which discover the multiple ways in which family influences African-American male students to be retained and graduate from college. This study serves as a contribution to the few which inclusively examines this phenomenon. The 14 African-American male seniors whom currently attend a predominantly white university and a black historical college lend agency through their voices on how family supports have been the dominant retention factor for their persistence to remain in college.

Seven themes emerged through their experiences, which describes how families have offered a wealth of wisdom, nurturing, and guidance in many matters of their life pertaining to their mental, emotional, and spiritual essentials. Their experiences provide an advantageous retention strategy, which could be significantly beneficial for faculty, administration, and staff members of higher education institutions, early outreach programs, bridge programs, and last but not least- families of African-American males.
Retaining African American Male College Students: A Qualitative Study
Examining the Influence of Family Support Networks as a Retention Factor

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science
Department of Family Studies and Social Work

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication ........................................................................................................................... v

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................ vi

Chapter 1: Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
  Problem Statement ........................................................................................................... 1
  Research Question .......................................................................................................... 2
  Significance of Study ....................................................................................................... 2

Chapter 2: Literature Review ............................................................................................. 5
  Retention Barriers ........................................................................................................... 5
  Retention Investments ..................................................................................................... 6
  Contribution of Family Ties ............................................................................................ 7

Chapter 3: Methodology ..................................................................................................... 9
  Research Methods ........................................................................................................... 9
  University Profiles ......................................................................................................... 9
  Perspective of the Researcher ......................................................................................... 11
  Sample and Recruitment ............................................................................................... 11
  Data Collection Methods ............................................................................................. 12
  Data Analyses ............................................................................................................... 14

Chapter 4: Findings ............................................................................................................ 16
  Plant the Seed and Watch it Grow ............................................................................... 16
  Staying Power ............................................................................................................... 17
  Material and Monetary Provisions .............................................................................. 19
  Racial Identity Preservation ......................................................................................... 19
  Emotional, Mental, and Spiritual Aid .......................................................................... 20
  In the Absence of Family ............................................................................................. 21
Chapter 5: Discussion

Discussion of Findings

Study Limitations

Students Recommendations

Conclusion

References

Appendices

A: Recruitment Letter

B: Recruitment Flyer

C: Telephone Script

D: Informed Consent

E: Interview Questions
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father, brother, children, and my devoted friend. For my father Ray O. Paul Sr., who has passed away, but whose teachings about family and community remain alive in my thoughts and stir my emotions daily. You planted a seed 44 years ago and I hope that you are looking down from the heavens and seeing the fruit of your labor, and that you are proud and satisfied with my accomplishments. To my younger brother, Ray O. Paul Jr., who too has passed away, this is a tribute to you and your concerns about life and the genuine meaning of family. For my children Edward, Jasmine, Krystal, and Maya who I truly love and live for. Thank you for your patience, support, and your concerns while I have been on this journey. They did not go unnoticed. Finally, but by far not the least- to my friend Andrew Coggins who supplied my daily cup of humor and stayed dedicated to my assignment for our degree. Thank you for staying faithful and pouring your words of inspiration into my heart, it will always be full because of them.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First, I give honor to my creator for his goodness and his guidance while I have been on this assignment. Without him, I am nothing and could not have fulfilled this critical requirement. I am grateful for the wisdom, strength, and his love that he imparted unto me while I have been on this journey. May this academic achievement and my obedience to it bring him glory and cause a significant transformation for the people to whom it is written.

Secondly, I would like to thank all the students who trusted in me and shared their experiences openly and honestly. Your stories will remain as a blueprint in my mind and will keep me focused towards working for change. I hope that through your stories, positive developments will happen for our society and our future families.

Thirdly, I am extremely grateful to my Thesis Committee members, Dr. Kevin Bush, Dr. Cheryl Evans, Dr. Raymond Terrell, and Dr. William S. Newsome. Dr. Bush, your devotion to my assignment has been greatly appreciated. I thank you for challenging my academic abilities, providing constructive criticism, and for making certain that I produced a scholarly paper that has met the rigorous requirements to receive my Master’s Degree. I have become a better writer under your tutelage, and I thank you for your time and your patience during this assignment. Dr. Evans, I extend my gratefulness to you for staying constant and having me critically think about the future implications for this recent exploration. Your suggestions will be highly considered when I embark onto my next research endeavor. Dr. Terrell I am honored to have you as my reader, and I am looking forward to your ongoing wisdom regarding our ongoing dilemmas and how we must solve them. Dr. Newsome I am extremely grateful for your insight and willingness to challenge my thoughts regarding my subject matter. All of you have been exceptional and I thank each one of you for the critical feedback that you provided to ensure that I had a research project that would meet the required academic standards.

I also would like to thank some influential people who inspired me to achieve this goal in my life: Doris Richards, Isabel Brown, Ida Thomas, Cheryl, Teresa Willis, and my sister Carol Patton. I am extremely grateful for your words of encouragement, teachings about family, and your belief in me and my divine purpose to become one of the best “change agents” in the field of uplifting families. I will never forget you.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

African American males continue to experience a downward spiral in life, which not only leads to his destruction, but also has all the ingredients for a social disaster. Each day we continue to hear about the same negative problems that plague this group of society, yet the problem remains. One of the downward spirals continues to be in the retention and graduation rates at post-secondary colleges and universities. These appear to be the most daunting tasks that have to be resolved (American Council on Education, 2004). Many universities and colleges have strategies and programs in place to assist with retaining students, but the importance of family contributions are rarely noted. It is imperative that human development professionals and practitioners who have a vested interest in students examine the ways in which family can be engaged while they are attending college.

Problem Statement

There are many African Americans enrolling and being admitted to college, but the majority of these students will never complete their education. According to Khumoestsile-Taylor (2003), those who enroll have high attrition rates and many are not completing their degrees within six years. Their graduation rates have been declining for the last 20 years from 35.3% to 24.7%. Although many colleges and universities have services in place to assist with the attrition of students, African American retention rates continue to plummet (Jones, 2001). Colleges and universities throughout the United States now face a challenge in respect to ensuring that the retention and graduation rates of minorities increase. There are diversity plans and programs, statewide planning, ongoing dialogue, seminars, conferences and a host of other endeavors and activities that are occurring or taking place concerning this vital issue. Many of the objectives and mission statements have been put in place to assist with the campus environment, increase graduation rates, and to elevate the low retention rates, especially for minorities (Dumas-Hines, 2001).

Change is inevitable, and each individual school must meet this demanding challenge. Over the last ten years, higher education institutions have been struggling with the issues of how to recruit and retain minorities in their institutions to ensure that the campus environment is welcoming to the entire student body. These institutions continue to rely mainly on their own strategies and even though they acknowledge the known fact that families have a major impact,
they have not yet fully embraced the fact that families could possibly be the motivating force, which is needed to ensure that their strategies are successful (Cross, 2003).

The persistence and ongoing fortitude of an African-American male in college can be greatly contributed to the relationship he has with his family. A time when he is embarking upon one of his greatest milestones to conquer in his life; the passionate encouragement of family can assist with his persistence and fortitude of being retained and graduating, while immersed in the institutions of higher education (Guiffrida, 2005). Cutrona, Colangelo, Assouline, and Russel, (1994) mentions that the family does support many aspects of the well being of the African American male college student, and without family many would not be able to navigate through the tremendous efforts and daily anxieties that are encountered while attending college.

Best practices have proven that students whose parents are involved in their educational endeavors from elementary up until the time they graduate from high school do perform better academically and are most likely to graduate, compared to those whose parents are not involved. Dumas-Hines (2001) states that there has been a great wealth of new knowledge that has been added in the last 10 years to address the deficits which occur in the retention and graduation rates of black males. From the educational scholar to the common layman, new knowledge has been introduced, but many deficits remain.

**Research Question**

The strategies and plans that have been created by the institutions look innovative and promising, and some of their efforts have assisted greatly, but they cannot continue to forge it alone. What impact does “Family Support Networks” have on an African-American male college student? If we already know that the impact of family is prominent during their educational years prior to college, then how important is that network during the post-secondary years?

**Study Objectives**

The state of Ohio has many campuses that serve many minorities from a variety of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, but just like the rest of institutions in this nation they still need to improve their campus climate and establish strategies that will create higher enrollment, retention, and graduation rates for African-American male college students. The Ohio Board of Regents (2004) have created many plans and strategies to ensure that Ohio increases their retention and graduation rates of African American male students, but these strategies and efforts are not yet, making a significant impact on their retention and graduation
rates. Their plans and strategies will need to be revised and this goal could be achieved if colleges and universities would make a concentrated effort to focus on the family, and examine the impact it can have upon the success of an African-American male student.

One goal of the present research study is to provide insight and a greater understanding to African American families who have or will have members that will be attending or currently enrolled in higher education. This valuable information can empower and encourage families to continue or begin to take charge of ensuring that their family member graduates from college. The change agents (e.g., early college preparation programs, primary and secondary school counselors, bridge programs, and higher education state agencies) that work and deliver services to younger and older adolescents could convey this information to parents prior to their sons entering higher education. In addition, practitioners can be enlightened with this vital information and review or revise their institution’s strategies and objectives to make certain that families are one of the leading factors recommended to help increase the retention and graduation rates of African American males.

There are many studies which have addressed this matter mainly from a quantitative research methodology; rarely, however, are there any studies which address this issue from a qualitative perspective. The phenomenology tradition of qualitative inquiry was selected for this study to examine the voices of 14 African-American male students who were in their senior year at two public Midwestern Universities in the United States. One is a predominantly white University, while the other is an historical black University. Through their own entailed stories the students provided a wealth of information about the phenomenon of family support networks and how these family influences have contributed to their success of being retained, and encouraging them to eventually graduate. In addition to making meanings of how their families supported them, they were able to express how these networks impacted and influenced their decisions to remain in school and graduate. Chesla (1995) mentions that the phenomenology approach can provide innovative information about how families view their behaviors and experiences with one another. The students can describe the reality of their encounters within their family environment. The exploration, significant discovery, and understanding of their meanings of family supports and how they live their experiences will lend agency to the institutions that are struggling with dismal retention and graduation rates.
The writer of this research has a compelling interest in this subject matter because of aspirations of attaining a Master degree in Family and Child Studies. Desired career goal for this writer is to become a Parent Involvement/Retention Specialist. The duties or tasks involved would be to ensure that students remain in school by using all internal and external resources that will contribute to the goal of increasing the graduation rates of all students, specifically African-American males. This writer has 15 years experience in the Human Service Field extensively in the areas of parent involvement, enrollment, and retention.

Many of our youth have dreams, but lack the support or tools to efficiently reach them. This current study examines the ways in which “family support networks” assists with this disadvantage, and lends valuable information to empower professionals in the field to create the strategies regarding how families can be effectively utilized to increase the retention and graduation rates of African-American male students.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature focuses on the past and current practices of retaining African American male students from an educational institution viewpoint, but also covers the limited information that speaks to how families have assisted with this endeavor. The review also provides information pertaining to how some of the colleges have included family in their strategies. Most of the current literature is written from an institutional viewpoint mainly emphasizing theoretical and statistical information. It is rare to find specific literature that exposes in-depth qualitative research findings that speak about the positive solution that non-institutional support (e.g., family support networks, community networks) could offer that assist with the retention and graduation rates of African-American male college students.

The limited literature that is available about “family support networks” is informative and provides detailed information. It is considered to be a new body of research compared to the past research that has focused on the deficits and failures of the adolescent Black male. This new body of literature provides insights on the empowerment, resiliency, and strengths of the Black male youth. Its focus is mainly on the impact that family or the larger community contributes to his chances of gaining success and beating the odds. This new work being introduced by researchers focuses less on attrition and concentrates more on the strategies that ultimately lead to graduation (Choy, 2002; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002).

Retention Barriers

Researchers in the past have studied the African American male population as a single entity, making comparison to majority students as a single group. The most recent research indicates that researchers now study specific ethnic groups and subgroups and then compare various groups to the majority group. This new way of research has provided new knowledge about African-American students. There are specific factors that most college students view as critical to their success. The literature points out that most have to adjust to a new environment, a different value system, and an intensified awareness of one’s own ethnic minority status (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora 2004).
There are bombardments of past research that continue to point out the deficits which hinder the progress of African-American males even before they enter college. The following issues have been defined as continued barriers: “(a) personal issue or challenges, (b) lack of meaningful college preparation, (c) tougher high school graduation requirements, (d) passing standardized tests, (e) curricular relevance, (f) culture, (g) geographical location, (h) lack of money of financial support, and the most significant (i) lack of appropriate academic preparation” (Khumoestsilie-Taylor, 2003, p. 3).

The additional literature that is discussed in Vincent Tinto’s research (as cited in Rendon et al, 2004) indicates that social and academic integration on the campus is a main criterion for student retention and is significant for the retention of African-American students. The findings indicate that the environment of the campus can usually determine if a student will remain in college. Racial and ethnic prejudices and discrimination that students face on campus influence academic success and educational outcomes (Roach, 2001).

Many African-American students believe that they are not nurtured or accepted by faculty and student peers. They have a sense of not belonging and this has an impact upon their educational endeavors (Khumoestsilie-Taylor, 2003). Previous research also supplies an abundant amount of information regarding students not being properly prepared in the K-12 grade levels, which has a boomerang effect on their enrollment eligibility at certain institutions, and in many cases, the classes they must take before they can declare a specific major. Lower retention rates are more likely to evolve from lack of academic credentials, ambition, and study habits. First generation college students and those who attended rural schools are at higher risk for dropping out of college (Dumas-Hines, 2001).

Retention Investments

Many colleges and universities with high graduation rates among black students have set in place orientation and retention programs to help these students adapt to the cultures of predominantly white colleges. Other institutions appear to improve graduation rates through black student organizations that foster a sense of belonging among the African-American student population. The focus on college student persistence is based on testing and validating Vincent Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) highly acclaimed model of student departure (Rendon et al., 1997). Rendon, et al also states that, Tinto (1993) notes that his persistence model is an interactional system where both students and institutions through social and education
communities are overtime continually interacting with one another in a variety of formal and informal situations. Key to the interactionalist views is that persistence is contingent on the extent to which students have become integrated into the social and academic communities of the college.

There are major supporters who believe that an increase in black teachers and speakers, and academic support services will fulfill this crucial need to increase the retention and graduation rates of African-American male students (Jorge & Roth, 1997). The federal government will be a major stakeholder- by mandating that colleges and universities increase their retention and graduation rates or face cuts in their federal financial aid funding. Although possibly causing some to be uncomfortable, retention strategies that evaluate the schools effectiveness must be in place. Jones (2001) suggests that this can be accomplished by comparing actual retention and graduation data of the university and then comparing this data to selected peer institutions. This data can also provide information pertaining to the environmental factors that contribute to the attrition of African-American male students. The strategy must include the vision, such as the statement of values, mission statement, and objectives of the institutions retention plan for minority students. It is imperative that the strategies provide time lines with built-in accountability structures designed to increase the retention and graduation rates of African-American male students.

Contribution of Family Ties

The success of an African-American male can be highly contributed to effective parenting that he has been exposed to. Many authors suggest that high aspirations and high achievements are major components of a strong black family (Cosby, 1971; Harris, 1970; Pearson, 2001). According to Kenny and Stryker (1996) family supports and interaction correlates with social adjustment and institutional attachment for all students.

Qualitative interviews with parents and children from single parent and two parent households across varied economic status and educational levels revealed that child focused love, strong limit setting and discipline; continually high expectations; open consistent and strong communication; positive racial and positive male identity; and full use of community resources are all major factors that add to the success of an African-American male student (Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998). The authors stated that many fathers in their study mentioned that they challenge their son intellectually and advocate for them within the
educational system; whereas the mothers’ concentration is geared more toward the setting she creates at home. The home must be the main hub where educational lessons must be attained (Hrabowski et al., 1998). One interesting finding indicated that some of these mothers’ have made their sons their number one priority and have went to great lengths to place his needs above her own. Sons in this study revealed that their success is directly tied into the involvement of their parents and the tremendous contributions that they have made in their academic endeavors. They believed they were better prepared for academic success based on being read to early in life, parental involvement in the school, provision of extracurricular activities and making sure that their education experiences were in good academic environments (Hrabowski et al., 1998).

Another quantitative study discovered in the literature revealed that African-Americans experience more stress, have lower persistence rates, and lower self-esteem while attending a predominantly Caucasian university (Walker 2002). The main finding in this study indicated that those students who had higher parental supports were less likely to withdrawal. To lessen some of the feelings of emotional abandonment endured by the student, it was suggested that college student personnel could serve as a change agent to increase relationships between parents and students (Walker 2002).

Although not inundated by a mass amount of literature, the limited amount of findings indicates that more research is needed to demonstrate and thoroughly investigate the positive influences that “family support networks” can have on an African-American male student who is attending college.
Chapter 3

Methodology

This research study investigated the effects that “family support network” had on 14 African-American male students when they were in their senior year in college at two different universities. The study explored (a) what family member motivated the student to attend college, (b) what impact they had on them while in college, and (c) determined if they would still be attending and graduating from college without the support of family members.

Research Methods

This study is both exploratory and descriptive in nature. The objective of the study was to determine the various ways in which family has contributed to the retention and graduation rate of African-American male students. The stories were obtained from students who were theoretically selected to participate in an open-ended, semi-structured qualitative interview, and examined the relationship between the student and their family members. Most studies have used quantitative methods, although there are some limited interviews that have been approached from a qualitative perspective. The qualitative analysis in the present study permitted an examination of the overall scope and nature of the influence that family has on a student when they are attending college. It is vitally important that the researcher permit the stories to be told in a manner which family members, future students, and practitioners could fully understand to aid in their assistance when supporting and encouraging African American males in higher education institutions. The voice of the student is the discovery of the realities within the phenomenon under study, that is, family support networks of African American male college students.

University Profiles

Participants attended one of two universities in the East North Central States of the country. Each university is a public institution and is known for its overall high retention and graduation achievements. Two distinct differences between the two universities is the racial composition of the student bodies, as well as the retention and graduation rates for African American students. That is, African American students who are retained and graduate from University One are much higher compared to this same race at University Two, and University One is 90% African American, while the population of African American students at University Two is only 3.2%. This is to be expected since University One is a historical black
college/university, and University Two has consistently for many years maintained a dismal retention and graduation rate for African American students. The demographic information provided for the seniors from University One is for the current school year 2006-2007 and the information provided for University Two is for the 2005-2006 school year (See Table 1). All of the following data has been gathered from the lead agency that oversees all of Ohio’s public and private colleges and universities (Ohio Board of Regents, 2005, 2006).

Table I
Total Students Enrollment, Percentage of African Americans, and Retention and Graduation Rates of Minorities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics:</th>
<th>University 1</th>
<th>University 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Body</td>
<td>1,766</td>
<td>14,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race of African American</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention Rate</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation Rate</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

University One is a public institution that provides strong liberal arts foundation with majors in selected fields. Known for nurturing its students with a value-based environment focused on excellence in teaching and learning, research, and public service. There mission is to academically prepare students with diverse backgrounds and educational needs for leadership and service in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world.
University Two is a residential university with a focus on teaching undergraduates a liberal education core, which complements the more specialized studies of the major. Their mission is to preserve, add to, evaluate, and transmit the accumulated knowledge of the centuries to develop critical thinking.

**Perspective of the Researcher**

It has been noted that “bracketing” permits the researcher who has their own history, beliefs, and assumptions about the subject matter to examine and reflect upon their personal meanings of the phenomenon to ensure that there is no bias that occurs while interviewing and that no arrogance would be demonstrated towards the respondent (Manen, 1990). To write down my personal thoughts about participant’s families and their African-American sons at many times permitted me to reflect upon my future with my son who I hope one day will be entering college, and what he will have to endure as an African-American male college student. These reflections kept me mindful of the subject matter and kept me grounded in my purpose and driven to reveal the significant findings of this critical retention factor, which is “family support networks.”

**Sample and Recruitment**

The sampling strategy used for this study was nonprobabilistic- which consists of the most prevalent application called purposive sampling (Chein, 1981) or purposeful (Patton, 1990). It is also referred to as criterion-based selection (Lecompte & Priessle, 1993). To gain knowledge about the phenomenon being studied, it was extremely important that the sampling reflect the students who could provide the richest details. Therefore, the students selected were required to meet the following three criterions for the study: 1) African American males, 2) seniors in college, and 3) had family support networks while he was attending college. The sample used had to meet the abovementioned criterion to bring forth the most in-depth information about the phenomenon under study, so the type of purposive sampling used was maximum variation sampling.

The sample consisted of 14 African-American males who were over the age of 18, and were in their senior year of college. Six students were recruited from University One and eight students from University Two. Respondents from University Two were recruited in a form of a Research Flyer (Appendix A). This notice was posted and distributed by an essential staff member who works in the Learning Center at the University. The notice had this
researcher’s name and telephone information for those who were interested in participating. Subjects were students who were currently attending college and who have had the support of family since attending college. The respondents all had to have family networks, which had a significant impact on them while they have been attending college. This was assessed through qualifying questions that needed to be answered to determine if the respondents were eligible to participate (Appendix B). Once the respondent was deemed eligible to participate, they were invited to meet with the researcher at an agreed upon public setting on the campus grounds. I permitted the respondent to choose a place that provided a sense of comfort for them to be actively engaged in while participating in this research study. Respondents from University One were to be recruited in the same manner as University Two. The recruitment and selection of the students were to be from those who responded to the research flyer or were referred to the researcher by the student affairs staff personnel. Unfortunately, however, the essential informant for entry into University One did not follow through on their commitment to the research project. Due to time constraints to collect the data, students were recruited on location at University One in the Student’s Union Hall. All the respondents who participated met the criteria for this research endeavor and were treated in the same professional manner as the students who participated from University Two.

**Data Collection Methods**

Prior to any data being gathered, permission was acquired from all of the appropriate University’s Institutional Review Boards (e.g., the university where the participants were enrolled as well as the home institution of the author.). That is, the appropriate applications were completed and sent along with the requested documents to meet the requirements of the protection of human subjects. Once approval had been granted, contacts with all the parties that were to be involved in the initial stages of recruiting were begun.

The data gathering for this study was semi-structured open-ended interviews, which included probes and follow-up questions (Appendix C). Probing was used while interviewing to attain a thorough understanding of what the respondent wanted to communicate and to ensure that their story had it fullest meanings to describe how family had contributed to their college endeavors. Subjects were asked to participate in a study that was examining the impact of family support networks and how these networks affected the retention and graduation rates of African-American male college students. Each participant was individually interviewed. The
interviews for University One, due to the time constraints, were conducted in their Student Union Hall where there was minimal student activity taking place. This was the atmosphere at this location because it was exam week and the game center was closed. The students at University Two were interviewed at the Cultural Center on campus. There is a variety of rooms in the center that offered the students and the interviewer the privacy needed to conduct the interview without any interruptions. The interview consisted of nine questions. The respondents were given a consent form to view and sign before the interview began, to make certain that they understood the nature of the study and the minimal risks and discomforts that could occur during the interview (Appendix D). There was not any discomfort, stress, or risk that was apparent while I was interviewing the respondents; nor did the respondents speak of any discomfort. If any discomfort were detected, I would have ceased to ask any additional questions and permit the respondent to regain a level of comfort to continue the interview. Participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary. If a question was asked and the respondent did not feel at ease to respond, they would have been informed that they could refuse to respond to the question. I the researcher also informed the respondent that they could end the interview at any time. If at any time during the interview any extreme discomfort from the student were noticed, they would have been provided with a community-counseling list (Appendix E) to seek and address their mental or emotional distress. Students were also asked if they had any additional questions before the start of the interview.

There are three conventional methods a researcher can use to record interview data, (a) tape record, (b) take notes, and (c) the least desirable is for the researcher to write down as much as they can remember after the interview (Merriam, 1998). Two data recording methods were employed for this study due to delays from the Institutional Review Board, time constraints, and the non-follow through of key informants. Mechanical recording was not feasible in the public locations where the interviews were conducted for University One. Handwriting the responses verbatim from the students increased the time spent conducting these interviews, which ranged from 25 to 30 minutes. The tape-recorded interview times were approximately 15 minutes. Although both are common methods to use, the tape-recorded interviews permit the researcher to return to the recordings to use for increasing their interviewing skills and to conduct further analyses of the data.
Each respondent was given a pseudonym code name. These code names were assigned to conceal the identity of the students. The researcher is the only individual who would be able to identify the respondents. The students were informed that their audiotape would be destroyed once transcription had been completed, and that their information would be kept confidential and handled and stored through methods to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. The researcher informed the participants that their information would be stored in a locked filing cabinet inside a locked room. Consent forms and interview material were stored in a fastened yellow business envelope inside a locked filing cabinet.

No deception, implied consent, or debriefing were used in this study. The researcher ensured the students that prior to any data collection, that permission had been granted from the appropriate University’s Institutional Review Board.

**Data Analyses**

To ensure rigor, field notes were taken prior to, during, and after leaving the field. Rigor serves as the foundation to demonstrate the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings (Thorne, 1997). Trustworthiness can be proven by relationships with experts in the field, written documents of the process, field notes, tapes, and transcripts. The field notes included the dates, times and locations in which any information was recorded. Upon leaving the field, the researcher made a concentrated effort to begin to review her notes from a neutral perspective to make certain that all pertinent information had been captured and would provide meaningful data. Analysis of the data was constantly reviewed and the researcher stayed mindful of ensuring that the major direction of inquiry was inductive to ensure validity of the study. Continuous reading and reflecting on what was heard seemed to be a never-ending process. The constant writing and rewriting of notes permitted me to continuously reflect on the data and to think about what each individual was saying in their individual personal revelations, compared to what they were saying as one cohort who had shared meanings of the phenomenon as well. The data had to became rich and thick before I could actually leave the field, so once the data began to serve as a template for the literature review and no longer provided any additional information to the data and began to replicate itself in several areas, I was assured that I had exhausted all the analytic tasks that needed to be achieved.

All taped and handwritten interviews were transcribed and verified twice with the aid of a Student Assistant to insure accuracy of the responses and to verify the interpretation
and consistency of the themes discovered. The student assistant and I continuously reviewed
the data to reveal the hidden and the overt data that was in the information provided by the
respondents. The answers to the interview protocol were analyzed to determine the richest
meanings of the phenomenon, which lead to the development of creating the themes which
were obtained from the findings.

Lastly, to ensure validity I viewed the findings and made a comparison to determine
how they correlated with the literature found on this research topic and identified themes for
this study.
Chapter 4

**FINDINGS**

As stated previously; the purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the ways or means in which family members influence their male college members to stay retained and eventually graduate from college. Not only do parents influence them to stay, but they also provide many of the supports that the students need to persist and be retained. Through this in-depth analysis it was determined that parents have various strategies they use unintentionally and intentionally to support their family members to matriculate into higher education and to remain until graduation. From this analysis, seven themes were discovered that describe how family supports increase the likelihood of African-American male college students being retained and graduating from college.

**Plant the seed and watch it grow**

Who are the primary motivators and what do they say? The students share their childhood to adulthood memoirs about the family members who stressed the importance about why it was important for them to attend college and achieve their academic goals. These relatives were parents, aunts, cousins, uncles, siblings, and grandparents (See Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Members</th>
<th># of Relatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mothers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisters</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt</td>
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<td>Cousin</td>
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<td>Father</td>
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<td>Mother and Father</td>
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<td>Mother, Father, and Grandmother</td>
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<td>All Family Members</td>
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Multitudes of diverse statements have been mentioned and they have remained consistent regarding the importance of getting a college education. Although they were mentioned as
pertaining to various stages of their lives, they had a powerful impact on these students journey into higher education. Students reported that some relatives just mentioned that it would be in their best interest to go to college. Steve said, “My uncle died when I was younger but he bestowed in me to better myself and help to build traditions.” Andrew indicated that his mother constantly reminded him of the benefits. Kevin’s mother told him that it would give him a greater advantage in the workforce. Some of the students had role models that had completed their college education or were currently attending. Tony said, “My cousins motivate me…they were attending here and encouraged me to come.” Phillip’s mother had a graduate degree, so he felt that he needed to meet her standards. Some of these students had family members who expected it to happen and therefore the students were left without a choice. Ivory mentioned that his family emphasized that there was no alternative and everybody motivated me. Ray said that his mother said something powerful to him. She said, “You are not going to stick around here a be victim of circumstances.” Edward talks about an aunt who insisted that he go and Norman said, “Both my parents attended college and they expected me to go.”

When students were asked about who motivated them the most while they have been in attendance at college, which was followed by a probe (when needed) such as asking, “how did that family member motivate you,” Milton mentioned that his mom pushed him and gets on him. He stated, “She sees the better in me.” Andrew said, “Cousins is always telling me to stay in and get out.” Kevin mentioned his mother; in addition to a significant friend who helped him get on the dean list. This is how he interpreted people in his family motivating him.

**Staying power**

What does family say or demonstrate to ensure that their African American male family members remain in college? The student’s experiences ranged from simply needing someone whom offered words of endearment to help them to continue their college education - to those who were at risk of dropping out. Many students mentioned that pep talks and someone to listen to them were vital ingredients that they needed while they were in college. Miles mentioned, “My father did not have an opportunity to attend college…he continued to motivate me and….help me understand that many people do not have this opportunity”. Quinten mentioned that his Dad just got his bachelor degree two years ago and his mother has her associate’s degree. He said, “They told me I better stay in college so I just went on.” Tyler contributes his persistence to stay in college by a significant statement his grandmother said to
him. She told him that he would beat the obstacles that were surely out there to stop him. Tyler is planning on doing just that and said, “I am a winner.”

Students who were on their way to leaving college expressed that they needed intense interventions when they knew that they were at risk of dropping out. These students spoke of their experiences and what they felt during those times when they wanted to leave. They spoke about what family members said and the actions they took which had a powerful influence on them remaining in school. These students were ready to leave, but stayed because of the ongoing vigorous encouragement of their family members. Edward shared one of those times by stating the following:

I got really angry many times while here, and did not usually want to talk to any family Members about how I felt. I did not want to seem like I was complaining, but one night I thought I would have packed up and left. I called my Aunt and she asked about what did the church teach you. I was angry when she mentioned this, because the church was farthest thing from my mind. When I really thought about it I knew that I had many teachable moments that had occurred while I was attending church and I was able to gleam back on those memories, which ultimately helped me get through these difficult times at this school.

One statement mentioned by his Aunt changed the course of his thoughts about leaving college. Quinten convened a related experience when he mentioned that upon his arrival to college he immediately wanted to leave. He states:

I was determined to leave Miami in the beginning. My dad told me that I had to stay and graduate. He had the nerve to tell me that I could not come back home until I do. Who would not stay after that? I really got ready to leave anyway, but I did not want to disappoint my family. It has been a bit shaky here at times. I have even feared that I was not going to finish. Daddy’s words were always my motivator. I feared those words about if I did not finish I could not come back home. I guess he was challenging me to stay and thanks to him I did. Not sure if this was the best way to do it, but I am graduating after being here for five years.

Rather viewed as encouragement or not, this statement from his father was convincing enough for this student to stay. Another student, Leon, mentioned his disappointment and his desire to leave, but in the end, he was happy he stayed. He said, “Everyone in my family …was not trying to hear about me wanting to leave or leaving. I was outta here and …I look forward to going back home to be in a diverse environment again.”
Material and monetary provisions

Most students who attend college have needs that they depend on from their family. The students in this study were asked about how their families have been involved in their college experience; some of the students talked mainly about having their material and monetary needs or wants met, which they believed were extremely important. These students spoke about money matters. Miles mentioned that, “Financial assistance and any opportunities for scholarship through their companies.” Milton said that his family, “Gives me money when I need it or do not need it.” Students who spoke of a combination of needs mentioned food, new clothes and school supplies. One student talked about how he had enough to help peers who were in need. Quinten said, “I could call home and ask for anything I needed and they sent it right away. Some of my friends would have trouble going on and I could sometimes help them out if they needed something.” One student talked about his grandmother and mother doing the “extra stuff.” This student was having difficulties with his grades, but once he improved his grades the grandmother sent him on a trip to Florida. Her reward motivated him to continue to meet his family’s expectations concerning his grades throughout the rest of his years in school.

Racial Identity Preservation

Some students struggled with maintaining their racial identity. These students described their experiences in vivid details, and without the support of their family members they could have been those students who dropped out of college due to the unwelcoming environment of the campus. The topic of racial disparities surfaced for different questions that were asked during the interview. In reply to the question, “When you think of your family members, did they have any impact on you staying in college.” This question was frequently probed with, “How did they have an impact on you staying in college?” The students who attended University Two were the only students that made mention of racism at the institution they were attending. At times there were some disturbing statements made by these students in response to interview questions, especially from Leon who was from Africa. He described his experience as the following: “In my household racial pride was taught, and coming here to this racist college challenged my individual pride about myself and my racial heritage. I was paranoid while attending…most times. My family had a big impact to keep my pride intact.” In reply to the question, “Is there any family member that has motivated you the most while you have been attending college?” Norman mentioned his father and how he understood what he was going
through. He said, “As a black male having to endure racism, I believe he could relate to my identity issues.” This same question elicited the following response from Leon:

I cannot begin to tell you what the fear of paranoia will do to you when you are in a system that does not recognize your existence. I have been paranoid and did not know how to survive here and needed the support of my family. My parents had to be my mind at times. The culture shock was a lesson learned indeed. The anger at times was overwhelming and the ignorance of my own just left me completely devastated. I appreciate the culture and pride lessons that I learned from my parents because these blacks up here have it all twisted. I am not sure what kind of training they got about their own, but they might as well be white. The black students I have observed at this university have no black pride. My parents taught me about racism and how to always have “black pride.” The ongoing teachings from my parents helped me to get to this year and once again I cannot wait until I return home.

This student alluded to three significant experiences regarding his racial identity

1.) Paranoia about his race with those who share his race; in addition to those who did not, 2.) Possibly his first experience of any recognized racism, and 3.) The cultural teachings that came from his parents.

In reply to the question, “Do you believe that it is important for family members to be involved with a family member that is attending college” and probed with “how do you believe it is important?” Ray said, “I am certain anyone would need it here who was black. Like I said earlier my mom provided comfort for me, because you will not get it here from the students or your professors. She made me feel like I counted and told me not to pay attention to these people here who can make you feel worthless.” Edward said, “When a black person comes to college that does not acknowledge them without family being involved- you are probably going to drop out. An experience like this can make you never want to return to a mixed college again.” These students’ experiences are consistently confirmed in many scholarly research studies that have addressed the environment or campus experiences of minority students who attend a predominantly white university.

**Emotional, mental, and spiritual aid**

Many students who attend college have stresses that they must contend with while they are working hard to reach their academic goals, and most of the students in this current study had family members that assisted them to get through those difficult days. These accounts speak to how family helped them though those times of despair.
Steve said, “Mother has helped a lot, phones and checks on me.” Tyler explained that his family listens to him and they do not care when he calls to talk. He stated, “Sometimes I have had to talk for hours to complain about something…so just knowing they could lend me their ears…made me really appreciate my family more. Edward emphasized the conversations he had with his aunt that were of a spiritual nature. He communicated his experience with the following statements:

My aunt encouraged me with scripture and I talked to my preacher a couple of times. Like I said I was kinda mad about what they preach at church and then I come here and I do not see the love or the acceptance. It just makes you think harder about what life is really going to be like. I am healing slowly from that mixed message, but I believe my aunt when she tells me about the power of God. I just have to remind myself sometimes and keep trying to believe it.

In the absence of family

Students were asked if they did not have the support of family would they have attended college. Astonishingly some of them mentioned that they would not have been in college. This question was asked from two angles for all students. The first question asked was, “Do you believe that without the support of your family members you would still be attending?” and the other being “Would you still be in school if you did not have the support of your family members?”

In response to these questions, these students talked about working instead of going to college. For the first question Steve said, “Probably not. Mom is a beautician and a barber. We have our own businesses, so I would have joined them and still made money.” For the second question asked and probed with “Why not?” Miles said, “I wouldn’t. If I had gotten a job I would not be here. Sometimes the money overshadows the desires.” Milton indicated that he too would have went to work for this same question.

Some students did mention that they would still be in college because of their own academic goals without having family members who supported them. Andrew explained that it was his decision from the beginning and stated, “This is a rare opportunity for me according to the stats.” Similarly, Kevin speaks of his own personal motivation, “It is always good to have self-motivation.” Leon emphasized the following declaration, “Education is the key to our success as black people. This was taught so I would have went to college because it would have
been the natural thing for me to do. We cannot always depend on family to take care of what we need to do as a people.”
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Through the voices of the African American males in this study, there have been many declarations that lend evidence to the influential impact of family support networks. Verified by the previous findings discussed in the literature review, we are able to determine that parents and extended family members play a pivotal role in the academic lives of African American male students. Hackett and Jackson (1993) explain that African American families have historically maintained a family cohesiveness, which has been one that is supportive and satisfying to all family members. Coles (2006) has stated that 90% of African-American families have strong emotional ties with their family members and reside in the same geographical areas. He believes that these ties are strengthened by their frequent involvement and the intensity of their emotional attachments they develop with each other. The values of African American families are transmitted to their young by teaching them the importance of work ethics, independency, and community involvement. They teach their young to have a determination for success that can be achieved by adopting a healthy racial mindset. Their “honor for the mother” is a value that is highly esteemed. Newman (2000) points out that the mothers in these families are perceived as being the main contributor to their children’s success. African American families are also known for “other mothering” which includes co-mothers who are the grandmothers, aunts, sisters and cousins (Coles, 2006). Their ways of behaving and teaching the importance of academic excellence in their family member’s life is crucial for their success throughout their primary, secondary, and post secondary educational years (Bonner, 2003). There is not one specific blueprint that speaks to the family’s ways of behavior, but there are processes that many seem to emulate or ones that share striking characteristics, which support the findings.

From the information gathered it stands to reason that many families are encouraging and supportive of their family members who are attending college. Kenny and Donaldson (1992) believe that parental attachments are associated with all aspects of college adjustments. Their study has indicated that many do finish because of family members who helped them persist in their efforts to graduate. This is consistent with Wilson and Allen (1987) who suggest that African-American adolescents are encouraged by their parents (in many different family structures) to succeed academically and socially. These authors have also suggested that mothers
play a special role in fostering achievement in their children, a role either denied or ignored in earlier research. It has also been pointed out that children are highly valued in African American families and given priority above other family members. Supportive networks for adults are also a trait that is recognized within African American family units. As an extension to these families, community members can also assist with the well being of African American adolescents and young adults.

For the students that have an immediate or extended family member whom has graduated from college, it appears to be a perquisite for them to attend college also. These family members have set the academic excellence standard and have passed on valuable advice and wisdom to these students. Moreover, previous researchers have asserted that the non-attainment of a college degree does not effect other family members who have a desire for academic achievement (Newman, 2000).

The students indicated that it was their “family support networks” that assisted them through turbulent times. Family can serve as an emotional base for students. It was obvious that many of these students had family members who they frequently called on for guidance and reassurance in time of need. Nobles (1997) states:

The sense of family will give (black children) the security of knowing that no matter what happens, the family love and protection will be unconditional and ever-present. The sense of family will help them realize that in their people (and not necessarily things) they will find a common meaning (definition) and a common ground. (p. 91)

Many times African-American males at predominantly white colleges and historically black colleges will experience numerous extreme barriers, which prevent them from continuing their college careers. There are barriers that are present which are inclusive to both types, which will be pointed out when necessary in this section of the study.

According to previous research, African-American males do not seek out supports as readily as African-American females, nor do they seek out other African-American males to assist them with their multiple needs (Jackson & Moore, 2006). There are numerous reasons they choose to leave college according to the research. The students in the current study have stated that their continuance in college was maintained by having someone who was available to address their emotional, mental, spiritual, monetary, and financial needs. If there were more social supports offered, many of their needs could be met. In addition, the students could also seek out supports, which could address the services for their needs. Although inclusive of family,
there was one student who mentioned his girlfriend, who assisted him with his academics. Her assistance resulted in the student being able to achieve the required grade point average to make the Dean List. According to the research, many of their socioemotional needs could be met by in class and out of class experiences. Students should be developing relationships with peers, faculty, and professional staff members. These relationships are critical for many reasons, Light (2001) states that many positive outcomes for the student can stem from these relationships.

According to Harper (2005), college students who are active participants in student organizations and campus activities will gain many profound learning opportunities which can carry over into the classroom where many African American male students feel isolated. These important and essential relationships elevate their academic achievements (Dennis, 2005).

Through their voices, we are able to determine that encouraging words or statements provided the coping mechanisms that assisted with their retention. The need to be successful to avoid being like other family members who were not privileged to attend college was a motivation for one of the students. His family members encouraged him to seek a better quality of life, which will elevate him to a status unlike his family members who have not attended college. Similarly, another student spoke to neighborhood conditions and the environment in which he did not have a desire to return. Not wanting to endure the tragedies he has witnessed in his neighborhood, words spoken by his grandmother kept him focused on his purpose for staying in college. To avoid the circumstances that could lead him to become a victim of the social and environmental catastrophes that happen in many destitute neighborhoods, was something that he knew he could avoid by continuing his college career.

The students who were ready to drop out of college appeared to be suffering from many aspects of learning how to adjust to the environment, which they believed, were not supportive of them due to their race. It has been demonstrated by both quantitative and qualitative studies that parents and other supportive people can help these students acclimate to their new surroundings (Dennis, 2005). Inundated in other research studies are findings that suggest peer supports help the student adjust to the campus environment. While family members are the ones that assist with the emotional aspects of this new environment. The students at University Two were experiencing racism.
Racism refers to:

“The assumption that psychocultural traits and capacities are determined by biological race and that races, differ decisively from one another which is usually coupled with a belief in the inherent superiority of a particular race and its right to domination over others.” (Merriam Webster, 1993, p. 1870). One student mentioned that he “felt invisible,” while another remarked that the “college was racist.” The student who had a family member that kept him motivated by the use of spiritual supports was angry many times during his years in school, but contributed his retention to his Aunt and the power of God. Wilson and Banks (1992) indicate feelings of unworthiness and feelings of being alone will of course often be seen as a lack of motivation on the part of students, rather than the effects of racism or other external factors. His beliefs based on what he had been taught in church about love and acceptance was not proving to be what he expected while attending school. He became very bewildered by the opposing behaviors of others that shared his environment and began to question his own beliefs. Thus, an environment that made him feel unvalued effected a foundation that served as part of his well being and his fortitude in life.

It is well-known according to Coles (2006) that African-American families have relied on the church over many years as a way to cope with various stressors that are inflicted upon them in this society. Many of these inflictions stem from historical and current racist attitudes. The church provides a “purposeful sense of being” that speaks to African Americans talents, self-esteem, strengths, and value as a person in this society. It is a strong tower, which they seek as a place of refuge to form connections on a spiritual level to deal with many of their psychological, emotional, and material needs.

One student mentioned that his father had threatened him by stating that, “He could not return home if he made a decision to leave college.” This parental threat or parental expectation could be attributed to the authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles in which African-American families’ practice. The father could also be viewed as a parent who is teaching how a reaction to any negative situation could result in a less favorable option. This father appeared to be teaching a profound life lesson to his son. The father’s reaction was also permitting his son to make his own choice. This student’s fear of not being able to return home was the motivator which assisted with his endurance to remain in school. Although some may view it as a negative consequence, this parent either believed or knew that his son would not choose the lesser
alternative. This response to his son’s desire to leave seems to be one of those cases where people will resort to “whatever means necessary” to reach a specific objective. In this case, it proved to be vital to his son’s retention and eventually graduating. Coles (2006) mentions fathers who take on a non-traditional position in the home are more likely to value discipline and expect higher achievements from their offspring.

The climate of the university was mentioned several times throughout this study. The students who attend the predominantly white university (University Two) spoke to their experiences that did not provide the diversity that they needed to feel included. The other student who was ready to leave expressed his need by talking about how he could not wait to get home after graduation where he could be in an environment that made him feel included. He mentioned that everyone in his family persuaded him to think differently about leaving college. They insisted that he stay and endure his discomfort, which he proved to do, still longing for a diverse environment.

It has been found that many African American students will not seek help until there has been a probationary warning issued (Roach, 2001). Lacking social peer/faculty relationships takes an extreme toll on many students who attend predominantly white colleges. Not being able to form meaningful relationships hinders their ability to grow and develop many skills. Abilities that are essential to communicate effectively while interacting in a social and academic environment are many times absent, which lessens their academic potential. For the rare occasions when they do seek out or develop relationships, it will usually be with someone who shares their racial identity. Guiffrida (2005) found that students who have made strong academic gains have sought help primarily from black faculty members, as students claimed that white faculty members provide minimal supports, which did not meet their needs for academic success. The students in Guiffrida’s research pointed out that black faculty members go beyond the call of duty by tending to their independent career goals, in addition to their academic goals. They speak to their individual and psychological needs and claim that black faculty member are strong advocates for them and state that Black faculty members have faith in their abilities and present academic challenges for them to meet. Meeting challenges in the literature refers to “raising the bar.”

African American faculty and student affairs members are expected to be all things to African-American male and female students. It is even more difficult for those who are affiliated
with a predominantly white university. This occurs because there are fewer staff members who are black and employed at these institutions. Yet they are expected to be professors, and or staff members who perform the roles of parents, tutors, mentors, and friends to students who look to them for their socio-emotional and psychological needs.

The students in this study also spoke of their anecdotal and systemic experiences that challenged their racial identity. One student who was born and raised in Africa was the most vocal about this issue. His statements were profound and spoke to his cultural upbringing and the pride he felt about his heritage and his skin color. Prominent findings in the literature verify that family members who teach cultural pride and communicate positive messages about one’s race will have children who will be properly prepared for the prejudicial acts they will need to confront (Coles, 2006). I will assume that because of the student’s reaction that he has probably not been subjected to any incidents of discrimination prior to moving to the United States. He said, “It was a cultural shock and that the ignorance of his own left him completely devastated.” This student’s observation of his own peers created a negative impression because he believed the students who shared his skin color at the university were void of any black culture or ethnic training. Thomas (1999) points out that black families must socialize their children to understand the differences associated with their skin color. Family members who make certain that this preparation takes place are providing the coping mechanisms needed to adjust to many of the environments where there children may be victims of racial oppression (Thomas, 1999). The experience of being paranoid by the African student was something newly discovered in this study. His mentioning of being paranoid is consistent with the findings in previous research (Helms, 1990).

Feeling disoriented, overwhelmed and experiencing panic attacks can accompany any situation where racism has occurred. This “paranoid” feeling has been explained as someone who is constantly explaining their actions or behaviors, and they begin to question the non-threatening behaviors of others. In this case, for this student it proved to be other students who shared his skin color. This is unhealthy and especially detrimental to many areas of the students well being, clearly this behavior is not healthy for anyone.

It has been highly suggested that black parents in America teach their children survival techniques to successfully adjust to their unkind environments, where they will not be accepted as a full member of or member at all in many institutions (Thomas, 1999). This teaching is
typically referred to as racial socialization, and can contribute to a child having a healthy self-esteem and positive racial identity. For example, one student mentioned that his mother told him, “To not pay any attention to these people here who can make you feel worthless.” He also spoke about the emotional comfort she extended unto him. His mother’s supportive attitude and reaction to her son’s distress provided a strategy in which he could adopt to help him to remain in school. It has also been reported that these endless acts of racism can largely influence and shape an individual’s personal identity and racial identity (Thomas, 1999). One student alluded to this by mentioning that, “This school will try to tear down everything that you know is great about you.” Racism among African-Americans is a historical event and perpetual, which means that these families will have to continuously provide the extensive and ongoing teaching and dialogue to facilitate the welfare of their members. It has been stated that they are the only parents of color who must be engaged in this activity for a prolonged period (Coles, 2006).

All students are in need of monetary and material provisions while attending college. These students in this study mentioned these needs numerous times, which were provided by their family members. There was no student who mentioned any difficulties or lack of having their needs met. The primary needs mentioned was food and money. One student said that he was “Able to assist other students who were in need.” Another student mentioned that he was rewarded with a trip to Florida, when he met the requirements for his grades. Not only did family members provide for the students necessities, but continued to support them with their material longings. There also was no student whom mentioned being employed, which indicates that their family members have provided a sufficient amount of monetary and material needs, including their desires for these students while they have been in college.

When asked about their ongoing engagement in higher education the students responded to the two following questions with mixed answers. The students interviewed were asked “Do you believe that without the support of your family members would you still be attending?” and secondly they were asked, “Would you still be in school if you did not have the support of your family members?” The questions were probed with, “Why do you believe that?” and “Why not?” In response to the first question, six students mentioned no; seven students said “yes”; and one student mentioned that “he did not know.” In response to the second question, three students said, “No”; six students said “yes,” two students did not mention yes or no; and three students said, “They do not know.”
These two questions asked at different times during the interview resulted in students mentioning nine times that they would not be in school if they did not have the support of their family members. For the students who did mention that they would continue without family supports, there could possibly be one significant reason or a multitude of reasons for them to stay and pursue their academic accomplishments. Their self-esteem may be elevated because of the following: (a) higher, stronger belief in their own intellectual abilities, (b) self-reliance, (c) higher peer support, (d) stronger ethnic identity, and some may have had (e) more extensive and positive educational environments with family and school, which promotes characteristics and behaviors for academic accomplishments (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). From this current study, the students mentioned various reasons of why they would have stayed in school. One student mentioned that he was in charge of the final decision regarding his entry into college, whereas another student mentioned that it was the key to his success. Similarly, another student mentioned that he would be attending somewhere, but not at the school that he was currently attending because of the environment. This student stayed at this university because his mother convinced him of the reputation the university bestows regarding their academics.

Overall, most students in this study have made the claims that their tie with family members is the overarching determinant for them to remain steadfast and graduate from higher education. Family members are the primary caretakers who support them with their needs (e.g. psychological, physical, spiritual, socioemotional, monetary, and material). Especially in the absence of support from peers, faculty, and student affair staff members - family members serve as the buffer to address multiple barriers that prevent African-American male students from being retained and graduating from college.

**Study Limitations**

This study could have benefited from a larger sample of the population. The semi-structured interview could have included additional questions that would have given this study more in-depth information, in addition to getting additional demographic information for both student and family members. The particular ethnic group (i.e., African-Immigrant, Pacific-Islander, etc.) in which the student closely identifies himself with could had been obtained to determine any remarkable or distinctive differences in cultural family beliefs and behaviors. The size of the student body at each college was drastically different, although both are referred to as small public universities. University One having approximately 1,500 to 2,000 students in
attendance and University Two approximately having an enrollment of 12,000-15,000 students. The methods of interviewing were not conducted in similar environment for all students. Eight of the students met with the researcher in public areas in private rooms whereas the remaining six were completed in public areas. Sixty-four percent of the interviews were conducted by writing out the student’s responses verbatim with the remaining thirty-six percent being audio-recorded.

**Future Recommendations and Conclusions**

Each student mentioned significant recommendations for students and families alike. From fourteen responses, the students mentioned a total of twenty-four recommendations that could be very beneficial to current and future college student parents. Their recommendations were very well thought out and represented what they thought was most important based on their personal experiences. They believed that it was important to have a support system that assisted them in their academic effort (e.g., checking on their classes, tutoring, and teaching them good study habits). They expressed that their needs could be met in the following ways by someone in the family who would (a) call and listen to them, (b) making sure that they were eating, and (c) having their monetary needs met. The students mentioned that having small talks before entering college about the benefits of staying in school and the risks must be instilled in children when they are young. A family member who (a) practices tough love, (b) sets examples, and (c) stays involved in your academic efforts was an important aspect of family support networks to these students. They also suggested that families need to pay close attention to first generation college students and have mentors for them before, during, and after graduation. Lastly, students recommended that family members should have a reward system in place when they attain their academic accomplishments.

With the positive findings gained from this research endeavor - these same findings can be used as a catalyst for families, college administrators, early college intervention programs, bridge programs, secondary school counselors, family support agencies, and the community at large to increase the academic achievements of African-American male students. This research is a contribution to the limited information that has previously been gained by other researchers who have chosen to conduct their studies employing qualitative methods.

When higher education administrators sit down and devise their strategies pertaining to how they predict to increase the retention and graduation rates of African-American males, it would behoove them to sit down and engage in a dialogue with African-American male students.
One issue that seemed to be prominent in this research is the need to address the environmental and campus climate at predominantly white universities. The contribution of families is definitely a retention and graduation factor that will need to be highly considered and used immediately to achieve the goals stated in many of their diversity plans and initiatives.

This information also serves as an empowerment tool for African-American families. Families need to be empowered with the knowledge that informs them of their contributions and how they have ultimately assisted with the increase of retention and graduation rates for these students. From this study, we were able to determine that many did not withdraw because of the powerful encouragement of family support networks.

College student personnel can use this information to design strategies when dealing with complex issues pertaining to retention and graduation rates. They can increase the links between parents and students and provide more internal activities to ensure that the students have access to family members and at least one significant faculty member or student affairs professional.

The media and a great deal of literature has spoke to the negative behaviors of the African American male, but this study has focused on how the family serves as a constant motivator and stronghold for the success of students being retained and graduating from college. This direction in the research contributes to the literature that highlights the resilient nature of African American families. Most of the literature that was found for this research project has provided a wealth of information pertaining to strategies, plans, and programs that colleges and universities are currently working on and many that have been implemented. National data provides best practices for recruitment and retention, and many college and universities have incorporated them into their current plans. The overall literature for this project is abundant for institutional endeavors, but is extremely limited in the findings regarding family contributions. Thus, again the argument can be validated by what we find in the literature.

At a crucial time when we are continuously losing this population to the social misfortunes of our country, it is imperative that we seek out the best solutions that will help end this overwhelming problem that continues to create a fine recipe for disaster. The most monumental strategy for the future would be for African American males and their families to be accountable and take control of their own destiny. This in no way negates the responsibilities of the higher educational institutions, but it must start with the family taking agency for their own. Taking agency means that African-American families must expect nothing else but excellence.
They will need to ensure that they are providing the best tools that are at their disposal to make certain that their children are ready to conquer the barriers they face in our society. Most importantly, when the African-American family realizes that these objectives will need to be accomplished for survival purposes and that the welfare of this population’s existence in a free society rests upon these major changes. The ultimate responsibility belongs to the family, whether or not others will support them. Taking on the responsibilities of facing the difficult circumstances and challenges must be ingrained into the minds of families. When this becomes the priority, African American families will be responsible agents of their own and create their pathways to success for African-American male college students. One student said it best, “Family is the link between staying in or leaving. Family is the link between dropping out or staying and graduating, at least for me and I am sure many others.”
References


Appendices
Appendix A

RESEARCH STUDY RECRUITMENT
NOTICE

If you are an African-American male who is currently in your senior year and over the age of 18, then I would be very interested in speaking with you about how your family interacted with you since you have been in college, and how they may have assisted with you staying in college.

The purpose of this research study is to gather information about how families interact with African-American males who are currently or were recently in college. This research will also examine the effects that family members have on a student’s retention while attending college.

If you volunteer, the interview will last approximately 30 minutes and all information will be held confidential. The interview is informal and will be conducted in-person with Darla Dixon

(Graduate Student in Family Studies and Social Work)

Your participation would be greatly appreciated and I would be thankful to have your input in this African-American Research endeavor, please contact:

Darla Paul-Dixon
Graduate Student
101E McGuffey Hall
Miami University
(513) 529-2323
pauldidl@muohio.edu

or

Dr.Kevin Bush
Assistant Professor
Family Studies and Social Work
101E McGuffey Hall
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(513) 529-2323
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Appendix B

Retaining African American Male College Students: A Qualitative Study Examining the Influence of Family Support Networks as a Retention Factor

Telephone Script/ Interview Time

Hello my name is Darla Dixon and I am a graduate student in the Family/Child Studies Department. I am conducting a research to examine the influence that family members may or may not have when an African-American male is attending college. The purpose of this study is to determine how families influence African-American males who are attending college and what effect that has on retention and graduation rates. You will be invited to participate in an informal interview conducted face-to-face. The interview should not last any longer than 30 minutes.

I do have a couple of qualifying questions that I need to ask to determine if you are eligible for the study.

**Senior College Student**

1. Are you over the age of 18?
2. Have any of your family members been involved with you while you have been attending college?
3. Are you in your Senior year of college?

If yes to all questions: Ask respondent if they would be willing to participate in your research study. If they agree to be a part of the study then invite them for an interview. Make arrangements to meet at the library (in a private space) for current college students.

**Date of Interview:** ________________
**I.D.:** ____________________________
**Time:** __________________________
**Place:** __________________________

39
Appendix C

Retention of African-American Males in College: A Qualitative Study Examining the Influence of Family Support Networks as a Retention Factor

I.D. Code: __________________
Date: ____________________

Questions for Semi-Structured Interview with African American Males Currently Attending College

1. Who motivated you to attend college?
   The following probes may be used:
   -Was (name) a family member or not?
   -Who in your family motivated you to attend college?

2. Did you personally make your decision to attend college or were you encouraged more by family members?
   Who encourage you and in what ways did they do that?

3. When you think of your family members, did they have any impact on you staying in college?
   How did they have an impact on you staying in college?

4. Is there any family member that has motivated you the most while you have been attending college?
   How did that family member motivate you?

5. In what ways have family members played a part in your college experience?

6. Do you believe that without the support of your family members you would still be attending?
   Why do you believe that?

7. Do you believe that it is important for family members to be involved with a family member that is attending college?
   How do you believe it is important?

8. In what ways do you believe family members can contribute to the success of a member that is attending college?

9. Would you still be in school if you did not have the support of your family members?
   (If answered no) Why not?
Appendix D

Retention of African-American Males in College: A Qualitative Study Examining the Influence of Family Support Networks as a Retention Factor

Informed Consent Document for Current College Student

This interview involves research that will examine the influence of family support networks with African-American males that are in college or have dropped out.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary.

If you choose not to complete the interview there is no penalty to you.

You can also end the interview at anytime you wish.

The interview consists of questions that will examine your relationship with family members while you have been attending college.

The interview should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete.

Risks to you in participating in this interview are minimal.

The benefit which I hope to derive from this study is to provide a substantial amount of rich data which illustrates the influences that a family can have on African-American male family members that are attending college. There is not enough literature, which speaks to the role that family members can make to assist with the retention and graduation rates of African-American males.

All information gathered from you will be kept confidential and handled and stored through methods to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. Your information will be stored in a locked filing cabinet inside a locked room. Your interview will be audio taped and transcribed afterwards. Your interview will be given a code number which you will provide and only I will know your identity. Once the transcription is complete your audiotape will be destroyed.

By signing below, you agree to be an active participant in this study

______________________________                                                                 __________________
Participant’s Signature                                                                                        Date

Principal Investigator
If you have any questions regarding this research, as a research
Please contact:
Darla Paul-Dixon
Principal Investigator
Family Studies and Social Work
pauldidl@muohio.edu
(513) 529-2323

Dr. Kevin Bush
Associate Professor of Family Studies
101 East McGuffey Hall
Miami University
(513) 529-2322
bushk@muohio.edu

______________________________                                                                 __________________
Principal Investigator                                                                                          Date
If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact:
Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship
102 Roudebush
Miami University
(513) 529-3734
humansubjects@muohio.edu
Appendix E

Community Counseling Service Providers

1. Cincinnati Counseling Service Inc. (3 Locations)

   Northgate- (513) 741-8044

   Blue Ash- (513) 791-5616

   Western Hills- (513) 922-1660

2. Core Behavioral Health Centers-

   (513) 541-7577

3. NORCEN Behavioral Health Systems-

   (513) 761-6222