An Exploratory Analysis of the Perceptions of Persistence Factors Among High-Achieving Black Male Students in STEM Majors at a Four-Year Public College

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An Exploratory Analysis of the Perceptions of Persistence Factors Among High-Achieving Black Male Students in STEM Majors at a Four-Year Public College

Abstract
The purpose of this phenomenological focus-group study was to gain insight into perceptions of persistence factors among successful Black male college students who major in the rigorous STEM field majors, at a 4-year college. Nine high-achieving Black male STEM majors reported that when it comes to academic persistence, they: (a) have an intrinsic motivation to succeed, which was instilled by their parents; (b) credited family or church influence in helping them to excel in academics; (c) believed that leadership requires certain characteristics that can be acquired through leadership training, and this can assist with persistence and future academic/career aspirations; (d) believed that it is important to persist because of academic and professional reasons; (e) believed that having supportive K-12 teachers and/or learning environment(s) helped them to persist in college; and (f) believed that employment opportunities, networking with peers and faculty for present and future goals, and positive peer pressure were all motivating factors in their drive to successfully persist. Black male self-identification as a "student leader" and leadership development appear to help facilitate black male persistence. This area of research continues to be limited in scope. More studies are needed to confirm if leadership engagement activities can contribute to their increased persistence.

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An Exploratory Analysis of the Perceptions of Persistence Factors Among High-Achieving Black Male Students in STEM Majors at a Four-Year Public College

By

Anthony D. Andrews, Jr.

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

Dr. Janice Kelly

Committee Member

Dr. Byron Hargrove

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St. John Fisher College

December 2016
Dedication

This dissertation is the result of many long hours spent researching and studying, and there were times when only my faith in God helped me to believe that it would be possible. However, I must acknowledge the support of my entire family, including my mother, father, stepmother and stepfather, children, and my brothers and sisters, especially my sister, Amira, who supported me during the process and played a critical role in my completion. Although the order of significance varied during periods of emotional and/or spiritual need, it was my mother who stepped forward in the very beginning of my pursuit and declared that she would sacrifice all to make my dream a reality. Through the last 30 months, she has been everything that I could ask for, and without her, this could not have been possible.

Likewise, I would like to thank my daughters who have been supportive; however, my youngest son has been steadfast, as he has sacrificed his personal time with me and traveled with me wherever he was needed and did whatever was asked of him without complaint. He has been my rock through the entire process, and although he has been the most impacted by me embarking on my journey, I hope that it leaves a positive, lasting effect on his psyche and encourages his persistence in school and in life.

I would like to thank my committee without whose direction I could not have completed my journey. Dr. Janice Kelly, my Chairperson and erstwhile professor, and Dr. Byron Hargrove, who jumped in and stayed steady during times of difficulty, and my advisor, Dr. Josephine Moffett, who stayed ready to help guide the ship to shore.
Lastly, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the guidance and support of my initial advisor, Dr. Claudia Edwards, who became an inspiration to me and started with me on my doctoral journey and gave me a foundation on which to build. I would also like to acknowledge my Executive Mentors. Thanks to Dr. Michael Baston, who sparked this pursuit of a doctorate and gave me the initial belief and support in my decision to enter and be successful in the program. Thanks to Dr. Vincent Banrey, who as my Vice President and Dean, supported me through the process and continued to mentor and provide support long after his semester of being an Executive Mentor. I give a special thanks to my good friend and former Dean, Dr. Tom Gibson, who continues to mentor me in my pursuit of becoming an executive leader in higher education. Enduring thanks to Dr. Cecil Wright, who has been at his best when I’m lost and looking for answers, and special thanks to Dr. Shango Blake and all of my friends, including those special enough to see me at my worst, when I seemed fragile and perhaps broken. I would like to thank my classmates, especially my cohort group, the Certif5ables: Susan, Jackie, and Tina; you are truly my sisters in spirit!

Thanks to the York College administration, my colleagues and students at York College, including President Marcia V. Keizs, who encouraged and supported me in my pursuit of this degree, and especially, Interim Acting Assistant Dean, Paola Veras, with whom I began and will complete this journey. You have been there through the difficult times, and I will never forget the role that you have played in this journey. May God bless you all!
Biographical Sketch

Anthony D. Andrews, Jr. is currently the Assistant Director of Student Activities and an adjunct professor in the discipline of Political Science at York College (CUNY). Mr. Andrews attended York College from 1985-1990 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1990. He attended Baruch College from 1995-1997 and graduated with a Master of Arts degree in Public Administration. He came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2014 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Mr. Andrews pursued research relating to the factors that influence high-achieving Black male collegians’ academic persistence under the direction of Dr. Janice Kelly and Dr. Byron Hargrove and received the Ed.D. Degree in 2017.
Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological focus-group study was to gain insight into perceptions of persistence factors among successful Black male college students who major in the rigorous STEM field majors, at a 4-year college. Nine high-achieving Black male STEM majors reported that when it comes to academic persistence, they: (a) have an intrinsic motivation to succeed, which was instilled by their parents; (b) credited family or church influence in helping them to excel in academics; (c) believed that leadership requires certain characteristics that can be acquired through leadership training, and this can assist with persistence and future academic/career aspirations; (d) believed that it is important to persist because of academic and professional reasons; (e) believed that having supportive K-12 teachers and/or learning environment(s) helped them to persist in college; and (f) believed that employment opportunities, networking with peers and faculty for present and future goals, and positive peer pressure were all motivating factors in their drive to successfully persist.

Black male self-identification as a “student leader” and leadership development appear to help facilitate black male persistence. This area of research continues to be limited in scope. More studies are needed to confirm if leadership engagement activities can contribute to their increased persistence.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter outlines the study with an introduction to the topic matter. The researcher then presents the problem statement, theoretic rationale for the study, and the statement of purpose. The researcher presents the central research question, potential significance of the study, and presents a definition of terms before concluding with a chapter summary.

The disproportionately low graduation rate of Black males in college continues to be an alarming trend in higher education, and the focus of many empirical studies (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Cuyjet & Associates, 2006a; Griffin, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Black males are failing in college. The Schott Foundation for Public Education Report (Beaudry, 2015) showed the national high school graduation rate for Black males was at 59%. However, although Black males are graduating high school at better than a 58% rate; they are only graduating college at 34% (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2014).

Black males are not persisting as well as members of other race/gender groups. The United States Department of Education (USDOE) (2014) reported that White males and females were graduating at 60% from public colleges or universities within 6 years, while only 39% of Blacks persisted and graduated during the same period. The data also show that 43% of Black women were earning their bachelor’s degrees in 6 years compared to 34% of Black males. Of the 44,000,000 Blacks residing in America in 2010 (DeNavas-Walt, 2012), only 18.7% of those between the traditional college ages of 18
and 24 earned a bachelor’s degree (USDOE, 2014). According to the USDOE (2014), more than 50% of all newly created jobs in the United States would require at least a college degree. It can then be stated that the lack of education that Black males achieve affects their ability to seek gainful employment. This impacts the socioeconomic structure of Black families, which in turn, impacts the ability of students to achieve academic success in higher education (Tinto, 2006). Since Black males have the lowest educational attainment rate of any race/gender group in America, their lack of college attainment continues to constrict their employment opportunities, socioeconomic status, family life, and quality of life (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2012). College persistence, defined as grade point average (GPA), retention, and graduation can lead to many societal advantages such as decreasing the likelihood of being unemployed (Tinto, 1975). The overall 2016 unemployment rate is at 4.7%. In 2016, the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed the national unemployment rate for Americans from ages 25 to 34, with a 4-year college degree, at an unemployment rate of just 2.1%, compared to 7% for those without a degree. DeNavas-Walt et al. (2012) reported findings from the 2010 U.S. Census that confirmed that over 53% of adult Black males were unemployed or had annual earnings at or near the United States poverty level. Therefore, obtaining a college degree for Black males can lead to better employment opportunities.

College persistence can lead to greater earning potential. The annual median income for Black students who graduated college with a bachelor’s degree was approximately $46,000.00 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Individuals with bachelor’s degrees earn approximately $18,000.00 more than those with just high school diplomas (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). When Blacks earn bachelor’s degrees,
they earn incomes that are comparable to other ethnic minority groups in America (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2012). In addition to income levels, 4-year college and university graduates often obtain stronger employment skills, career opportunities, and professional standing (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2012; Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

There are many empirical factors that impact college persistence for all students (Tinto, 1975). In addition to academic performance (Barker & Avery, 2012), college student engagement outside of the classroom can have a positive impact on student persistence (Astin, 2004; Harper & Quaye, 2007, 2009; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014; Tinto, 2006). The persistence of students of color at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) appears to be influenced by student engagement (Barker & Avery, 2012; Cuyjet & Associates, 2006a); Harper & Quaye, 2007; Tinto, 2006). Most of the previous studies that demonstrated a link between student engagement and persistence (Griffin, 2006; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006) failed to focus only on the most at-risk group—Black male students. Increasingly, Black male college students, more than any other race/gender group, appear to benefit the most by being more involved on campus (Harper, 2012, 2015; Harper & Quaye, 2007, 2009).

Problem Statement

What can be learned from academically-successful Black male college students? Instead of examining the reasons why Black males fail to persist, some researchers have begun to take a more positive psychological approach by systematically discovering how academically successful Black male college students persist until graduation and beyond (Harper, 2012).
Based on Harper’s anti-deficit achievement framework (2012), there are many factors, including familial, pre-college preparation and socialization, institutional factors, and class engagement, that often lead to persistence for academically successful, high-achieving Black males across many majors. Harper (2012) conducted 219 individual interviews over 2 years with high-achieving (i.e., cumulative GPA of 3.0 or above) Black males across a range of majors. Harper’s findings revealed that Black males involved in student organizations, student government, and/or fraternities were more likely to report a sense of connectedness to their institutions and their peers, which helped them to persist. While Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework seems promising, very few researchers have used this approach to connect student engagement to persistence for Black males (Wright, 2013). Building on Harper’s work (2012), this study explored perceptions of successful Black males using focus groups as opposed to individual interviews. Focus groups can be less expensive, less time-consuming, and allow for engagement among participants (Creswell, 2013).

Residing within the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, there are several academic majors that are in high demand with lucrative career options (National Science Board, 2016). The National Science Board (2016) shows employment growth in the STEM-related fields is projected to increase by more than one million jobs between 2012 and 2022. Unfortunately, there continues to be very few Black males majoring in the STEM fields in the United States. Additionally, Black males do not perform as well academically when compared to other student race/gender groups (Harper, 2012). Harper (2012) concluded that more research on persistence needs to be
done with high-achieving Black males in the rigorous and lucrative STEM majors. To address this limitation, this study focused only on high-achieving STEM majors.

One productive type of student engagement that appears to help Black males persist, regardless of major, is leadership development (Barker & Avery, 2012; Cuyjet & Associates, 2006; Dugan, 2006, 2007; Harper, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Leadership development refers to a program that teaches students how to become leaders through seminars, workshops, and experiential activities such as community service (Barker & Avery, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2007). It appears that Black male self-identification as a “student leader” and leadership development are worthwhile factors that help facilitate Black male persistence (Barker & Avery, 2012; Cuyjet & Associates, 2006; Dugan, 2006; Harper, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Despite a beginning trend, this area of research continues to be limited in scope and remains inconclusive (Dabney, 2010).

One promising focus group study conducted recently by Barker & Avery (2012) attempted to explore the ways in which a Black male leadership program promoted academic and social engagement for Black males. The activities of the leadership program included seminars, workshops, and experiential learning such as community service projects. Although they targeted freshmen and sophomores, Barker and Avery (2012) interviewed eight Black male sophomores and junior participants in STEM, business, humanities, and social science majors. The research findings concluded that the for these Black male students: (a) participation in the Black male leadership programs played an important role in their retention; and (b) the classroom environment at a PWI was challenging because the Black students they had to deal with lack of support from faculty; lack of pre-college readiness; and racial identity, stereotyping, and stigma.
associated with being Black males. While Barker and Avery (2012) did examine the perspectives of Black males in some STEM majors at a PWI using a focus group methodology, they did not examine all high-achieving Black males in STEM majors (e.g., students with at least a cumulative GPA 3.0 or higher). To address this limitation, this study focused only on high-achieving STEM majors similar to the study done by Harper (2012).

Another important Black male STEM major persistence study was done by Moore, Flowers, and Flowers (2014) in Bonner (2014). Moore et al. (2014) interviewed 30 Black males STEM majors at an HBCU. The study explored a range of persistence factors that impacted the academic and career development of Black male STEM majors at an HBCU. The authors revealed that Black male STEM majors highlighted the following encouragements toward their ability to achieve academically: (a) family members provided guidance, support, and encouragement; (b) academic performance, specifically in STEM, was impacted by parental engagement; (c) supportive K-12 teachers facilitated interest in STEM fields and encouraged them to pursue STEM fields; (d) access to academic support services supports academic achievement in STEM majors; (e) active participation on campus helped to develop academic self-efficacy and educational aspirations; and (f) strong positive relationships with peers and professors. However, although implied, no evidence was revealed about the academic success of these 30 Black male STEM majors based on their cumulative GPAs. All of the persistence factors noted by Moore et al. (2014) also fit within Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework.
Dabney (2010) firmly believed that future persistence studies should begin to examine the impact and value of intentional leadership training on the persistence of Black males. Harper (2012) discovered that high-achieving Black males often reported that participation in out-of-class engagement activities (e.g., leadership roles within student organizations and fraternities) had a positive impact on their college persistence. The question is: By building on this research with academically-successful Black males in STEM majors, would providing intentional college-level leadership training also lead to better academic persistence among Black male STEM majors? Therefore, this study was designed to explore the perceptions of high-achieving Black male STEM majors, with varying levels of leadership training, using a focus-group methodology and by using Harper’s anti-deficit achievement framework (2012) and three pipeline points: What role did (a) pre-college readiness and socialization, (b) college achievement (including perceptions of the role of leadership training), and (c) post-college success (including potential impact of leadership training on their post-college success and career readiness) play in the academic persistence of Black male STEM major?

**Theoretical Rationale**

Many academics have discussed the socioeconomic deficits that are faced by minorities who are seeking to attain a high school degree and/or degree in higher education (Hu, 2011; Reisel & Brekke, 2009; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Tinto, 1975, 1987). Shifting the focus away from exploring the at-risk Black male experience to the academically-successful Black male who persists and graduates has been a recent phenomenon over the last decade. Harper (2012) changed the paradigm by creating the anti-deficit achievement framework (Figure 1.1). This theoretical framework is a
qualitative analysis that is used to measure the Black male student experience through the lens of those students who had high rates of persistence and achieved a high degree of success in 4-year colleges and afterwards. The first pipeline point is Pre-College Socialization and Readiness. The three dimensions are Familial Factors (e.g., how do family members nurture and sustain Black male students interest in school?); K-12 School Forces (e.g., what do teachers and other institutional agents do to assist Black men in getting to college?); and Out of School Prep Resources (e.g., which programs and experiences enhance Black men’s school readiness?). Included in this pipeline point is this study’s queries related to leadership training (e.g., have family members and/or institutional agents in the K-12 grades encouraged these high-achieving Black male STEM majors to pursue leadership training opportunities?).

The next pipeline point is College Achievement, which includes the following dimensions: Classroom Experience (e.g., how do Black undergraduate men earn GPAs above 3.0 in majors in which they are academically underprepared?); Out-of-Class Engagement (e.g., what compels Black men to take advantage of campus resources and engagement opportunities?); and Enriching Educational Experiences (e.g., how do Black men cultivate value-added relationships with faculty and administration?). Included in this pipeline point is this study’s queries relating to leadership training (e.g., do these high-achieving Black male STEM majors perceive that it can be beneficial to pursue opportunities for leadership training in the college setting?).
Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework

Here is a framework that researchers, educators, and administrators can use to better understand Black male student success in college. It is informed by three decades of literature on Black men in education and society, as well as theories from sociology, psychology, gender studies, and education. The framework inverts questions that are commonly asked about educational disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation, academic underperformance, disengagement, and Black male student attrition. It includes some questions that researchers could explore to better understand how Black undergraduate men successfully navigate their way to and through higher education and onward to rewarding post-college options. This framework is not intended to be an exhaustive or prescriptive register of research topics; instead, it includes examples of the anti-deficit questioning employed in the National Black Male College Achievement Study. Insights into these questions shed light on three pipeline points (pre-college socialization and readiness, college achievement, and post-college success) as well as eight researchable dimensions of achievement (familial factors, K-12 school forces, out-of-school college prep resources, classroom experiences, out-of-class engagement, enriching educational experiences, graduate school enrollment, and career readiness). Each dimension includes 2-4 sample questions. Given what the literature says about the significant impact of peers and faculty on college student development and success (see Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), particular attention should be devoted to understanding their role in the undergraduate experiences of Black male achievers. A version of this framework has been adapted for the study of students of color in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields (see Harper, 2010).

**Figure 1.1.** Framework for persistence. From “Black Male Student Success in Higher Education: A Report From the National Black Male College Achievement Study,” by S. R. Harper, 2012. Copyright 2012 by the University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education.
The third pipeline point is Post-College Success including the dimensions of Graduate School Enrollment (e.g., what happened in college to develop and support Black male students’ interest in pursuing degrees beyond the baccalaureate?); Career Readiness (e.g., which college experiences enable Black men to compete successfully for careers in their fields?); and, again, included in this pipeline point is this study’s queries related to leadership training (do these high-achieving Black male STEM majors perceive that leadership training can positively impact their pursuit of degrees at the graduate school level and above? and is there a perception that leadership training can be potentially beneficial in their professional careers post-graduation?).

Displayed in Figure 1.1, the dimensions that were explored (as in the original study) included: kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) factors including academic preparedness; external college preparatory programs; socioeconomic conditions; familial support (or the lack thereof); curricular experience, co-curricular, and extracurricular experiences; positive collegiate academic experiences; and career readiness. However, unlike the original study, this study utilized focus group perceptions for the reasons explained in Chapter 3.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework persistence factors among high-achieving Black male college students enrolled in rigorous majors such as the STEM fields. This focus group study was to gain insight into the group perceptions of the value and impact of college-level leadership training on the positive academic persistence and future career aspirations of successful Black male college students.
Research Question

The central research question in this study is:

What are the perceptions of academically-successful Black college students with varying levels of leadership training in STEM majors about reasons for their persistence in college? Specifically, what roles did (a) pre-college readiness and socialization, (b) college achievement (including perceptions of the role of leadership training), and (c) post-college success (including the potential impact of leadership training on their post-college success and career readiness) have on their current persistence?

Potential Significance of the Study

The potential significance of this study is the potential value of what leadership training can do to increase the level of persistence of Black males in the STEM majors. Harper (2012) noted the dearth of Black males in STEM majors and the difficulties Black males have in completing their studies in the STEM fields. Researchers have established the value that leadership training can have on Black males’ academic persistence, but what if this is the one variable that could significantly impact a population that has been even more severely impacted in college majors and they seem to be having the most difficulty mastering (Bonner, 2014; Dabney, 2010). If leadership training could be determined to have an impact on this population and impact the students in the majors they are having most difficulty persisting, then it could conceivably also impact the students in other majors who are having a less difficult time persisting, thereby, giving college administrators throughout the country an opportunity to use a new theoretical approach to increasing the persistence of Black males throughout higher education. Additionally, if the facets of the national leadership program are perceived as possible
factors that could impact the academic success of Black males, then it is possible that some of these facets could be used to create other leadership programs, or to establish chapters on college campuses, with significant Black male populations that have distressed levels of persistence.

The local and national governments agree that Black male students are a population that needs to be given financial and academic support; yet, there has been no analysis to determine what type of support is necessary to create a climate of success for these students who are enrolled in colleges in the urban university system. Nationally, some colleges have not allocated the resources and made the commitment to resolve the problem of Black male student persistence (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Some colleges have no idea where to apply the funding to resolve the problem. It is clear that there is a problem and an obvious gap in the literature (Dabney, 2010) that has yet to be addressed. For the purposes of this study, successful students were considered to be those who had achieved GPAs of 3.0 or better, and who were either enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program at the college.

This study will assist in enlightening academicians and other researchers as to the factors that may lead to Black males’ successful persistence in college. Some researchers have discussed the merits of engagement and also the benefits of how participation in student groups as leaders has assisted Black males in the area of academic achievement (Barker & Avery, 2012; Cuyjet & Associates, 2006a; Harper & Quaye, 2007). This may suggest that leadership training could be beneficial to closing the achievement gap between Black male students and other race/gender groups.
The information that was acquired in this study will be of use to the university, but it might also be of use to colleges throughout the nation, especially those of similar ethnic composition. The variable of the leadership training program may prove beneficial, and possibly lead to more Black males staying in college; thereby affecting the national unemployment rates of Black males.

**Definitions of Terms**

*Black* – individuals of African heritage.

*Cohort* – a group of people sharing a common factor, such as the same age or the same income bracket, especially in a statistical survey.

*Community College* – an institution at which students are able to attain an associate degree within a 2-year period.

*Cognitive Complexity* – something that requires a thought process that is be able to unravel an issue of moderate intricacy.

*Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS)* – a consortium of professional associations in higher education that promotes the use of its professional standards for the development, assessment, and improvement of quality student learning, programs, and services.

*Extracurricular Programs* – curricula that are outside of the jurisdiction of traditional academic coursework.

*Grade Point Average (GPA)* – an academic calculation for each student based on cumulative grades.

*High Achiever* – a student that is motivated by a desire to receive good grades.

*Persistence* – the grade point averages and second-year retention of students.
**Poverty Level** – a subsistence in living at which people have enough money to meet only basic needs, such as food, clothing, and housing.

**Leadership** – the ability to encourage others with an authenticity, vision, and transparency.

**Minority** – a race of people that is different from the racial composition of the majority.

**Retention** – the act of keeping students in college through academic periods.

**Senior College** – an institution at which students can attain a bachelor’s degree within a 4-year period.

**SMART Goal System** – a structure that allows for the planning and completion of goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, rewarding, and timely.

**STEM Programs** – science, technology, engineering, and math major courses that are attended by students in college.

**Student Engagement** – the process of attracting and retaining students in co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

**Urban University System** – an institution of higher learning located in a city or municipal community.

**Chapter Summary**

The local and national governments agree that high-achieving Black male students in STEM majors at 4-year public colleges need to be given financial, social, extracurricular, and academic support; yet, there has been no analysis to determine what type of support is necessary to create a climate of success for this population. Because further research is needed in this area, this study looked at the paradigm through the
viewpoints of two perspectives: (a) anti-deficit framework, and (b) intentional student engagement through extracurricular programs teaching conceptual leadership. Harper and Quaye (2009) discussed the importance of leadership development as a variable to be looked at in Black male student achievement. Dabney (2010) suggested that this variable has not been explored enough to verify whether intentional leadership training will assist in the academic persistence of Black male students. This study yielded data that can assist in this determination.

In Chapter 2, the researcher reviews the history of related perspectives and provides a further perspective on the rationale for merging both practical viewpoints. The research design, methodology, and analysis is discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents a detailed analysis of the results and findings, and Chapter 5 discusses the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research and practice.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

This chapter includes a review of the current literature in the field as it relates to the study. The chapter concludes with a summary and reasoning behind this study.

The research indicates that the topic of Black students, in particular, Black males and their lack of persistence, is one of the more significant issues to be explored in higher education today (Barker, 2007; Bridges, 2010; Cuyjet & Associates, 2006a; Harper, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2007, Harper, 2009; Palmer et al., 2014; Reisel & Brekke, 2010; Williams, 2014). However, to understand the dynamic that is being addressed, it is important to look at the initial research on the subject of student dropout behavior and persistence through the work of Tinto (1975) who is the seminal theorist on student retention/departure from college.

Tinto (1975) studied the many deficits that impact student departure from college, such as: socioeconomic factors, family support, and intuitional connectedness. He studied how these factors affected students’ persistence. The examination of factors, such as familial support and institutional connectedness, allowed for a deeper exploration into the factors for positive persistence of students. Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993, 2006) concluded that student engagement and extracurricular activities can be a factor in the successful persistence of students. This was groundbreaking and allowed for future studies on persistence to be conducted in the areas of socioeconomic impact, student engagement, and extracurricular activities.
Harper (2012) acknowledged that socioeconomic factors may negatively impact Black male persistence but examined the reasons for Black male student success by looking at the primary reasons for their high level of persistence. Harper (2012) conducted research on high-achieving (3.0 GPA or better) Black males using the anti-deficit achievement framework to view persistence through the lens of those that are persisting at high level of academic achievement. Harper (2012) also found student engagement and extracurricular involvement, such as student organizations, fraternities, student government, and athletics, gives students a feeling of connectedness to the college, and this assists in their determination to succeed and secures their retention (Harper, 2012; Cuyjet & Associates, 2006).

Barker & Avery (2012) used a phenomenological qualitative approach to discover if Black male STEM majors at a PWI were aided in their persistence by their involvement in a Black male leadership program. The researchers used focus-group methodology to gauge the perceptions of Black male STEM majors as to the reasons for their persistence. The study concluded that the Black male STEM majors, of varying levels of academic achievement, were impacted by their involvement.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the body of literature related to Black male collegians and their persistence. This chapter outlines studies that display a link to the factors that negatively impact the academic persistence of Black male collegians (Bridges, 2010; Harper, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Palmer et al., 2014; Reisel & Brekke, 2010; Williams, 2014) and studies that link factors that may positively impact Black male collegians (Barker, 2007; Barker & Avery, 2012; Bonner, 2014; Cuyjet & Associates, 2006, Harper, 2014; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Additionally, the literature
review focuses on high-achieving Black male students in STEM majors and the research approaches that were used to discover the many factors that impact their persistence. It concludes with an introspective of one potential factor that has been under researched, with an allusion to a gap in the literature, and a summation as to what this could mean for future studies in the area of Black male collegiate academic persistence.

**Review of the Literature**

**Social integration theory.** Tinto (1975) developed a theoretical model to explain the reasons that can impact students’ dropout behavior in postsecondary education. They included cognitive ability and interaction between the student and the institution; specifically it’s administrative, academic, and social systems. He argued that if a student is properly integrated into these systems, the student has more of an individual commitment to the institution and to goal achievement, which ultimately may lead to greater persistence. He did recognize that external factors can play a role in persistence, such as: cognitive ability, family background (such as the level of parental education), past educational experiences (K-12 readiness), and goal commitment (motivation to successfully persist). Yet, Tinto (1975) posited that this might not be as big a factor as students’ institutional commitment and, as a result, an individual’s connectedness to the college. He suggested peer-group association and extracurricular involvement may be of equal importance in persistence. Tinto’s hypothesis was groundbreaking regarding social exchange and interaction with peers and institutional agents (such as administrators, faculty, and staff) may be important factors in students’ ability to persist. Tinto’s (1975) hypothesis became the basis for further research in student retention and departure from college.
The Schott Foundation Report (2015). Ann Beaudry (2015) performed a critical analysis, developed from research on the state of Black males in America, for the Schott Foundation. In a critical analysis, Beaudry gives insight into the state of the Black male in the K-12 grades, using quantitative data from the U.S. Department of Education and the Schott Foundation. The report viewed present day statistics in relation to the preparation of students (or lack thereof) and success and persistence (particularly of Black males) in the K-12 grades in an effort to determine if their lack of academic resources, socioeconomic status, and/or suspension rates were accurate predictors of present and future success. SAT scores and other nationally standardized tests and grades from regular and advanced courses were viewed, and moving averages were used to forecast the short-term success of students. What was discovered is that students in predominantly minority districts were not as prepared to succeed in the K-12 grades; therefore, they were not as prepared to be successful in applying to highly selective colleges. Many students of color who graduate are therefore ill prepared for the rigors of college, and they find it difficult to gain admission into 4-year colleges; and those students who are accepted find it difficult to excel and persist. They are thereby labeled as statistical dropouts amid the departure from college. This lends itself to the literature as an important analysis of Black male student academic persistence in the kindergarten through 12th grades. This study emphasized the importance of out-of-class preparatory resources, pre-college readiness courses, and experienced well-trained teachers as factors that impact the persistence of students in K-12 grades and their subsequent retention in college.
Analysis of the unintended impacts of the City University of New York
to increase diversity in admissions to its colleges. Treschan and Mehrotra
(2012) conducted an analysis (for the Community Service Society) of the enrollment
trends in the City University of New York since the recession. They used quantitative
data that was provided by the university, and they concluded that when the recession hit,
many more students decided to look at the City University of New York (CUNY) for a
more affordable education because of the negative impact on their socioeconomic status.
As a result, many CUNY 4-year colleges (also known as senior colleges) increased
enrollment standards (e.g., GPA and SAT scores) in an effort to deal with the larger
number of students applying. CUNY officials were correct in assuming that this would
lead to a more diverse population of students who were better prepared for success in
college. Unfortunately, many minority students were negatively impacted. Blacks and
Latinos were not able to compete with Whites and Asians for admission into 4-year
colleges because they were ill prepared for the SAT and Regents exams because of the
lack of resources available in the predominantly minority school districts (Beaudry,
2015). The result of this new admissions strategy resulted in more students of color
applying to community colleges.

CUNY was established to give access to higher education for low-income
families, many of which included students of color, but the students lacked preparation in
the K-12 grades and, therefore, did not make a successful transition to college. Many
students who attend a 2-year college (also known as community colleges) do not graduate
within 2 years. The 3-year graduation rate for Black students stands at 10.8% for the
2010 cohort (USDOE, 2014).
The majority of students who are accepted into 4-year colleges are not graduating within 6 years (CUNY Office of Research and Assessment, 2011). Many of these students are minorities, and they come from disadvantaged backgrounds, which, again, may show that socioeconomic status and a lack of preparation for these students in the K-12 grades impacts their transition to college and the subsequent academic persistence of these students throughout the educational ladder.

**Use of learning communities and their impact on student persistence.** Tinto (1993) continued his exploration of student persistence and the methods that were used to assist in the persistence of students. He researched and created learning communities of first- and second-year cohorts in the First-Year Experience Seminar at LaGuardia Community College. Many of the students came from a low economic stratum. He analyzed the importance of social peer interaction on campus, while incorporating an academic learning experience. He suggested that shared learning experiences in the classroom, with peers and intentional social interaction with faculty, gave students an opportunity to develop relationships that eventually contributed to their persistence. Although this was a new approach, it continued to validate his arguments that institutional commitment and social interaction between the students and between the faculty and students assisted in cooperative learning. In fact, in the examination of Seattle’s Central Community College, his findings showed that this model increased the persistence of students by 25% (Tinto, 1993). This furthered his belief that the interaction between students and between faculty and students was an important practice in helping students to academically persist despite economic challenges to their persistence, such as financial challenges, due to their socioeconomic status.
Student retention practices and analysis of the National Center for Educational Statistics study. Tinto (2006) reviewed the existing knowledge based on the factors that may lead to student retention, and he also analyzed economic stratification as a factor in student persistence. He cited a study from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), reported in 2003, that shows 56% of high-income students earn bachelor’s degrees in 6 years compared to 25% of low-income students. As many of these students were from the lower income bracket, and financial hardship played a role in their persistence, Tinto discussed the importance of extracurricular involvement in student retention, especially on commuter campuses. He theorized that faculty needs to be more involved in student retention so that it becomes more of an institutional commitment than simply a priority for the student-development professionals. Thus, the research continues to suggest that there appears to be significant challenges in persistence related to minorities, and that extracurricular involvement and the role that institutional agents play in the persistence of students, such as Black males, is important.

Minority dropout rates in higher education in the United States compared to a similar population in Norway. Reisel and Brekke (2010) conducted an analysis of minority persistence rates and possible related factors (socioeconomic status, lack of familial support, substandard education lower academic levels) in the United States (US) compared to Norway. They conducted a quantitative study that concluded that minority students in Norway, which are those who were second-generation, non-western immigrants or were recently arrived immigrants, showed no considerable difference in their rates of persistence. Although the educational systems are different, the Norwegian
minority students had similar socioeconomic disadvantages as those of the Blacks in America. In fact, the income disparity between the minority and majority classes in Norway is greater than in the US. When comparing the socioeconomic backgrounds of the minority and majority families of students in Norway against their U.S. counterparts, it still does not fully explain why Norway students persisted at a greater rate. Almost all of the institutions of higher learning in Norway are tuition free; therefore, socioeconomic status is probably less a factor in preventing students from attending college than in America. Another factor to consider is that the higher level of economic security in Norway (unemployment benefits, better salaries for part-time workers, substantive health benefits) may make it easier to secure a loan for college if necessary. Reisel and Brekke (2010) showed that the socioeconomic plights of minorities in the United States may not be the deciding factor in their level of persistence, and perhaps the others factors, such as lack of preparation for college (Beaudry, 2015) may be more significant to the students’ academic persistence.

**Difference between Blacks and Whites entering college.** Cabrera et al. (1999) studied the differences between Whites and Blacks entering college, and they discussed whether the perceptions of prejudice and discrimination in the educational system impacted the persistence of Blacks and Whites equally. They began with the following assertions: academic preparedness impacts persistence, successful adjustment to college involves severing ties to family and community. Perceptions of prejudice/discrimination are unique to minorities, and persistence of minorities is shaped primarily by exposure to a climate of discrimination (Tinto, 1987, 1993). The data was collected from 18 four-year colleges/universities that participated in the National Study of Student Learning,
which is a longitudinal investigation of the factors influencing student learning and personal development. There were 1,454 (1,139 White and 315 Black) students in the study. The model was based on the student adjustment and perceptions of prejudice-discrimination models. In short, the models measured the deficits that many minority students had experienced in the years before and during the transition to college. The instrument that was used allowed for quantitative analysis of whether these deficits (pre-college readiness, parental encouragement, perceptions of prejudice/discrimination, academic/social experiences) impacted their persistence in college (as measured by their academic development, GPA, and if they withdrew from classes). The results showed no difference between the perceptions of prejudice and discrimination although Blacks entered college with slightly lower pre-college readiness than Whites (Tinto, 1993). Blacks’ overall academic performances were lower than Whites, but they were more committed to the goal of college completion. This, then, would seem to suggest that Blacks should possibly have a higher rate of retention in college and thereby persist to graduation at a higher rate despite their academic and socioeconomic defects.

**Cross-cultural interaction among undergraduates.** Chang, Astin, and Kim (2004) studied the consequences, cause, and patterns of cross-cultural interaction among undergraduates in a longitudinal analysis that sought to understand if students were impacted by this social dynamic. Data was analyzed from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) (Chang et al., 2004) to investigate students entering college and then look at the same cohort after four years. The quantitative analysis used over 400 schools and investigated incoming students’ personal and demographic characteristics; high school learning capacity and college academic readiness; values; goals; self-
concepts; and career expectations. After 4 years, they were asked the same questions, in addition to recording the students’ college perceptions and asking them questions about their college experience. The results showed that cross-cultural interaction during undergraduate years can positively affect student outcomes (e.g., intellectual ability, civic interaction, and social skills). Therefore, opportunities to promote extracurricular and curricular peer interaction have shown to be a way to positively impact student outcomes.

**Student leadership development.** Kezar and Moriarty (2000) suggested that for Black males, one of the greatest predictors of persistence might be student engagement in extracurricular and co-curricular activities. They followed a subset of freshman over a 4-year period and assessed their development, using a qualitative analysis, in the areas of leadership, public speaking, writing, intellectual, and social self-confidence. Kezar and Moriarty (2000) found all areas enhanced because of the students’ involvement on campus with extracurricular and co-curricular activities. The study also included findings for White males/females and Black females. Each group was assessed based on their involvement in school activities, and all were positively impacted, but none of the other groups had such a low level of persistence than the Black males. The Black males, however, related that their experiences with programs that emphasized the mentioned areas: influenced their public speaking ability, increased their level of connectedness to the institution, and helped to develop confidence in their ability to lead others and be successful in college. This is further validation that students who are involved in extracurricular activities, specifically Black males, may have greater academic persistence than those who are not involved in extracurricular activities.
Impact of self-concept in race and gender. Pascarella, Smart, Ethington, and Nettles (1987) used the CIRP survey results from 1971 and 1980 to compare the self-concept—self-perception constructed through interactions with others and their environment—of 4,597 Black and White students when they entered 4-year institutions. Their findings revealed students’ self-concept in 1971 had the greatest influence on their self-concept in 1980 more than the variables of the students’ background and the characteristics of the institution they attended. The students’ levels of reported social and academic competency upon entering college significantly affected their social and academic integration in college. The researchers did, however, also observe some differences in certain variables’ effects on self-concept along racial and gender lines. Socially engaged leadership opportunities and involvement had the second greatest effect on Black males, while for White men and women of both races, the influence of this variable did not impact on their self-perception, which is a predictor of academic achievement (Pascarella et al., 1987). The researchers concluded that for Black males, more than other race/genders in the study, extracurricular involvement with other students positively impacted their academic persistence.

The role of active learning on social integration. Braxton, Jones, Hirschy, and Hartley (2008) conducted survey research regarding the impact of active learning in the classroom on the social integration of students. Students reflected that this style of learning gave them a sense of institutional commitment and thereby affected their connectedness to their college. Although the study was limited to residential/religious campuses, the researchers weighted the responses at two of universities, by gender and race, to the increase reliability of the data collected. The quantitative study findings were
consistent with Tinto (1975). Faculty members who actively engaged students in discussions in classrooms and counseled/mentored these students outside of the classroom gave students an enhanced sense of their institution’s commitment to the students’ academic success. The study concluded that peer engagement and students/faculty engagement in the classroom setting and outside of the classroom impacted the students’ academic persistence.

**Impact of experiential learning on the character development of college students.** Astin and Antonio (2004) surveyed 9,792 students from over 32 colleges who were honored by the John Templeton Foundation for excellence in the character building of their students. The researchers used a student information form as the survey instrument to measure pre-college attitudes, opinions, and goals, in addition to the students’ self-concept. Astin and Antonio surveyed the students over a 4-year period, through their freshmen and senior years. At the end of the 4-year period, they used the same instrument to measure the students’ moral and civic values. Although there was a possible predisposition because of their exposure to extracurricular activities in high school, many of the students became engaged in extracurricular activities at college, particularly in those activities that involved some exposure to experiential learning through leadership undertakings. Astin and Antonio (2004) showed that the students developed strong character traits while attending college, particularly those involved in leadership roles.

**Comparison of the genders.** Harper, Carini, Bridges, and Hayek (2004) compared the difference between the genders in the student engagement of African Americans at HBCUs. The study involved 1,167 African American undergraduate
students at 12 four-year HBCUs. The qualitative study analyzed which of the genders was more engaged. Although the data suggested that male and female students were equally engaged in extracurricular activities and felt supported by faculty and the institution, Black males were less prepared for the academic responsibilities, compared to Black females. The Harper et al. (2004) study showed that institutional commitment on the campuses of HBCUs may be a factor in the retention of Black students, and Black males might benefit more than Black females from specific types of engagement with their peers and faculty.

**Blacks in college and their level of persistence.** Griffin (2006) challenged the status quo by looking at anti-deficits for Black male collegiate academic persistence by investigating the positive factors that contributed to high-achieving Blacks in college who were persisting at high levels. Griffin looked at the trends of social integration, support from peers, and individual drive to become high achievers as reasons that the students persisted at high levels. She used qualitative study and examined the motivation of nine high-achieving Black students who attended a large public university. All of the students had GPAs of at least 3.0 and were from various socioeconomic backgrounds. The study determined self-motivation as the biggest factor for their high academic achievement. Although some of the students received familial support, others were motivated by a fear of failure and, still others, by career aspirations. None of the participants were given adequate educational preparation in high school; however, none of them allowed discrimination—in or outside—the classroom to discourage them from achieving high grades. The students never allowed any of the named deficits to crush their spirit, and all overcame the challenges to excel in college. Griffin (2006) suggested a need to look at
other ways to frame the Black college experience and the challenges that beset these students. High-achieving Black college students may be aided in their persistence if, at an earlier period in their lives, someone has instilled in them the motivation to excel and persist, despite their challenges.

**Todd Bell Center.** Feintuch (2010) reported on the work of the administrators, staff, and faculty at the Todd Anthony Bell National Resource Center for the African American Male, located on the campus of The Ohio State University. All programs at the center focused on personal needs, academic achievement, and the development of leadership skills. Students also learned from positive roles models who assisted by supporting them in their acclimation to the college setting and with identity development, which is a significant theme in working with this population of students. In a period of 5 years, the rate of persistence of the Black males at The Ohio State University increased from approximately 80 to 89%. Feintuch believed this was in direct correlation to the founding of the center. He also postulated that this provided further proof that the engagement of Black males in extracurricular and co-curricular activities, particularly in leadership development, ban lead to student persistence.

**Connection between involvement and leadership on campus.** Dugan (2006) measured college students’ leadership development using the Social Change Model of Leadership. The instrument was called the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale. He also tested the null hypothesis that there are no mean differences across the eight constructs of the social change model, which is based on: participation in community service, positional roles, formal leadership programs, or student organizations. There was a random sample of 912 students representing 10 four-year colleges. Of the 912
participants, 859 submitted completed instruments. The overwhelming majority were full-time students. The student racial breakdown included: White (64.2%), Asian/Pacific Islander (18%), Latino (7%), Black 5.7%), multiracial (4.1%), and American Indian (1%). The measurable items included: consciousness of self, commitment, common purpose, congruence, collaboration, controversy with civility, citizenship, and change. Additionally, participants were asked if they were involved in community service, volunteerism, and/or positional leadership roles with a student group, and/or whether they had some form of leadership training during their time in college. The results suggested some correlation between those students who scored highest on the items on the scale and their involvement in leadership programs and/or positions of leadership. Dugan (2006) thereby suggested that students who were more involved in socially conscious activities, such as service and volunteerism, were more apt to become leaders and be more committed to goal achievement, such as college completion.

**Developing leadership capacity in students.** Dugan and Komives (2007) measured college students’ leadership development using the Social Change Model of Leadership. They used the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale. Dugan and Komives also added a scale for leadership efficacy. Of the 55 campuses that were chosen to participate, 52 completed the scales, with over 63,000 completed student surveys. There were 165,000 students in the sample. They researchers investigated demographic data to determine the students’ pre-college socioeconomic background and variables related to student engagement and leadership development. The results showed that: mentoring of students, either by faculty, staff, or employers; campus involvement; service initiative; positional leadership; and formal programs, all impacted positively on the socially
conscious scale of measurable items, which were consciousness of self, commitment, common purpose, congruence, collaboration, controversy with civility, and citizenship. Dugan and Komives (2007) believed that the mentioned activities lend themselves to engaged and involved students, particularly those in leadership programs or who had been given leadership training, can become socially conscious citizens in society.

**Comprehensive analysis of varying educators’ perspectives on the crisis of Black male student persistence.** Cuyjet & Associates (2006) combined empirical analysis with breakthrough ideas and introspection of the Black male collegiate crisis. Several academics discussed their studies and used the U.S. Census and other survey data to buttress their innovative strategies. Cuyjet & Associates (2006) discussed an historical analysis of the obstacles that Black males have faced in their effort to achieve economic stability in society. Cuyjet & Associates (2006) discussed reasons for the lack of successful males in college, including socioeconomic factors; lack of institutional support, which leads to a lack of connectivity; and family and peer support. Cuyjet & Associates (2006b) performed an analysis of student engagement in extracurricular activities and the impact of leadership involvement (Cuyjet & Associates, 2006c) in student government, fraternities, and student organizations as a significant theme in the narratives of Black male students and their successful persistence. In fact, Cuyjet and Associates (2006) recommended that educators encourage Black male students’ involvement in student government and other leadership roles in student organizations. These, the authors suggested, can be factors in Black male academic persistence.

**Impact of student engagement in the development of Black male student leaders.** Harper and Quaye (2007) explored the significance of student organizations on
character and identity development as factors in the academic growth and development of Black males on college campuses. The researchers highlighted the relationship between student engagement and retention. They used a qualitative approach to interview high-achieving Black males that held leadership positions in student organizations. The objective was to examine how that involvement impacted their outlook on racial identification and related characteristics. Thirty-two highly active (in extracurricular activities) student leaders whose grade point average was at least 3.0 (high achievers) were chosen to participate in the study. Although there was some probable selection bias and question about the reliability because of the transferability of findings to other institutions (such as those which are predominantly minority or single sex institutions), the results of the study showed that Black male students believed their identity development was enhanced by their involvement as leaders in student organizations. The researchers thus surmised that leadership development may indeed enhance the persistence of Black males in college.

**Correlation between high-achieving, low-income students of color and students’ engagement and leadership ability.** Hu (2011) conducted an analysis of Gates Millennium Scholars (high-achieving/low income students of color) and whether receiving scholarships had an impact on their development as student leaders (independent of their student engagement levels). This was a longitudinal study of surveys conducted with freshmen (2001 & 2002). The first follow-up survey was conducted in 2004 and asked them about their college experiences. The second follow-up was administered in 2006 to the graduates. The survey was conducted using a quasi-experimental design (being awarded a Gates Scholarship is not a randomized process).
which included students with similar characteristics to compare whether Gates Scholars were impacted differently. The researcher thereby concluded that when minority students (e.g., Blacks, Latinos) were not concerned about how to finance their education, they were more involved and engaged on campus and this had a positive impact on leadership capacity in college and in their future academic and career aspirations.

Impact of student leadership programs on men of color. Barker and Avery (2012) explored the impact of student leadership development programs on the engagement and rate of persistence of Black males in college. Baker and Avery conducted a qualitative study to understand the ways in which a Black male leadership program can encourage academic and social engagement. They examined whether Black male students in this program were persisting at a greater rate. They used focus groups to collect data, create narratives and ascertain the effect of this program on eight Black males. They found that the students felt a sense of “connectedness” to a peer group by being more engaged in the extracurricular activity. Although they stated that much more research was needed it was evident that this leadership program made a positive impact on these students and could have subsequently impact their academic achievement, retention and graduation rates. The researcher’s findings reinforce the concept of leadership programs and the positive impact, in the area of academic persistence (student retention) these programs are making in the lives of Black males on college campuses.

Works relating to Black male success and building resiliency across the K-20 pipeline. Bonner (2014) reviewed research conducted by professionals analyzing Black male retention and academic persistence in the K-20 grades. Moore et al. (2014) presented a qualitative study using a structured interview format to interview 32 Black
male STEM majors. In the Moore et al. study, Black male persistence on the campus of an HBCU was discussed with the students. Although they were not necessarily high-achieving students, the results of the focus group perceptions allowed for insight into the reasons why Black males were not persisting at a high level in the STEM majors on this campus. The Black males were positively influenced by family members, and this was a factor in their educational outcomes and deciding upon a career after college.

The factor of pre-college readiness was also important in the participants’ decision to major in the STEM fields and to have the confidence to be successful. A theme emerged that related to having supportive teachers and a supportive learning environment in the K-12 pipeline as a key reason for their persistence.

The Black males in the Moore et al. (2014) study also discussed a fondness for their subject matter and also wanting to have a career in that area of study, and these career aspirations helped them to successfully persist. They also spoke about high quality of the academic work and enjoying the challenge of rigorous work. Although Moore et al. study only investigated persistence from a retention standpoint of Black males at an HBCU, it did allow for a glimpse into the perceptions of why the Black male STEM majors were successfully persisting and how they viewed their future career aspirations.

**Black male student success in college.** Harper (2012) created an assessment tool that he labeled the anti-deficit achievement framework. His premise for the creation of the framework was to view the plight of Black males in college from an altogether different perspective. Over the years, other researchers, such as Hess and Shipman (1965) Engelmann and Bereiter (1966), used deficit theory to explain why Black males were failing in college.
Hess and Shipman (1965) reasoned that those students from disadvantaged backgrounds had social, cultural, and/or economic environments that deprived them of the necessary elements to academically succeed insufficient pre-college preparation and were at a socioeconomic disadvantage. As a result, minority students had deficits factored into their persistence, and these deficits were difficult to overcome. This literature added to the belief that Black males would have a difficult time persisting in the K-12 grades and attending college because of their inherent deficits.

Engelmann and Bereiter (1968) further emphasized how being culturally deprived could create social and emotional deficiencies that affect student performance within the academic system. They believed that until these issues were dealt with by society, these differences would make it almost impossible for culturally deprived students to advance academically in their studies and therefore not have the wherewithal to withstand the rigors of college because of their societal deficits.

Both studies by Hess and Shipman (1965) and Engelmann and Bereiter (1968) became part of the basis for what would be known as deficit theory. Deficit theory suggests that people from the lower income strata are at that level of income because of inherent moral and intellectual deficiencies. Although this was ascribed to low-income minorities, such as Black males, Harper (2012) decided to take a different approach in looking at the deficits and challenges that Black males that could be overcome by using an anti-deficit approach to examine this phenomenon.

Harper (2012) stated that Black males in STEM majors were among the lowest in persistence, including lack of academic rigor in the K-12 pipeline. Using the anti-deficit achievement framework, and through the use of the National Black Achievement Study,
he looked at the data as it related to high-achieving Black male STEM majors. Harper (2012) analyzed their perceptions for persistence and cited pre-college readiness and the students’ connectedness to their institution through student engagement within student organizations as the major reason for their high level of persistence. Although this was part of the larger study (Harper, 2012), it is important to note because this is the group that comprises the focus groups for this study that this researcher conducted.

Harper’s (2012) qualitative phenomenological approach became the basis for his research using the anti-deficit achievement framework to gather the perspectives of 219 Black males who had successfully navigated college at a high rate of academic persistence while overcoming any perceived deficits. Harper (2012) reversed the dynamic and, instead, believed that despite the disadvantaged background of many Black males, there were those who had overcome these deficits and succeeded in college. He ascertained that although they had unique challenges, it did not deter the students from persisting (Harper, 2012). Despite their challenges, he inquired as to why these students believed that they were successful. The report, entitled *Black Male Student Success in Higher Education: A Report from the National Black Male Achievement Study*, highlighted Black male students that had achieved overall GPAs of 3.0 or above. They came from 42 different colleges and all had been considered leaders and were actively engaged in college.

In their narratives, these Black males discussed the challenges that they faced, such as lack of preparation for college and lack of institutional support, but they persisted despite these challenges. Some of the reasons highlighted for their success included: involvement in extracurricular activities, opportunities to develop formal and informal
relationships with peers, staff and faculty that supported their educational goals, and support from family and friends, many of whom did not have the level of educational attainment that the students were seeking to achieve. Harper’s (2012) belief was that more can be learned through viewing the issue through the lens of the anti-deficit achievement framework (Harper, 2012), which focuses on positive traits and attributes, because this is an under researched area of study.

Factors that influence the persistence of Black males. Dabney (2010) reviewed the existing discussion among educators regarding the factors that influence the persistence of Black males in higher education. He restated the factors that were summarized in the literature, such as tutorial programs and strong academic advisement; financial viability, such as grants, scholarships and other forms of financial aid; social engagement with other students in extracurricular organizations; parental and spiritual support, which had an impact on the persistence in the group of students. The research indicates that if these tenets are considered and the college is involved in ascertaining that some of these supportive endeavors are in place, institutions can positively impact the persistence of Black males. Dabney (2010) also stated that the impact of leadership development on retention efforts had only been discussed sporadically throughout the literature on persistence. He further stated that students who had served in leadership roles in culturally based organizations, Greek letter organizations, and student governance, had all benefitted greatly by serving in these roles, and they had positively impacted the students’ persistence, as they developed a sense of self-efficacy and confidence and became socially engaged in campus life. This has also been shown to be
true, particularly for Black males, yet the direct impact of leadership development on the persistence of Black males remains fragmented and understudied.

Chapter Summary

The literature shows that Black males can face many deficits that they must overcome in attempting to enter and complete college, whether it is in a 2-year or 4-year institution (Beaudry, 2015; Harper, 2012; Hu, 2011; Reisel & Brekke, 2010; Cuyjet & Associates, 2006). The data suggests that the problem originates in primary and secondary education (Beaudry, 2015), and this must be addressed in addition to the problems they may face after entering postsecondary educational environments.

The research also shows that students’ engagement outside of the classroom can have an impact on their levels of persistence (Astin, 2004; Palmer et al., 2014; Harper & Quaye, 2007, 2009; Tinto, 2006); in particular, Black males, as much or more than any other race/gender group, benefit by being more engaged in extracurricular activities on campus. The data also show that when college administrators are involved with creating opportunities for Black male students to be involved and encourage and support their personal and academic growth, it is meaningful to them and creates a level of support and connectedness to the campus (Bonner, 2014). This lends itself to increased academic persistence.

Additional research on Black males indicates that an area that must be examined is the impact of leadership development on the levels of persistence of this particular race/gender group in college (Harper, 2012; Barker & Avery, 2012; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Cuyjet & Associates, 2006). Academics have consistently found a correlation to Black males and their self-identification as student leaders as a
reason that has increased their persistence levels in college. In fact, the concept of leadership development is now considered by many researchers to be a major factor in stemming low achievement and the institutional departure of this particular race/gender group (Barker & Avery, 2012; Cuyjet & Associates, 2006; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Harper, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2007).

There is a gap in the literature that should be addressed with further research (Dabney, 2010). In fact, the literature dictates that this topic of Black male collegiate persistence, and the factors that lead these high-achieving Black male STEM students to successfully persist, merits further research. Additionally, the current literature lacks sufficient exploration of a correlation between leadership training and academic persistence of the race/gender groups. This study assists in the exploration of the possible correlation between leadership training and academic persistence and the study also examines if these high-achieving Black males perceive it to be a factor in their future academic and career aspirations. Chapter 3 explains the methodology and includes the: rationale for the design, research context and participant selection, focus group composition, instruments used to collect data, procedures, and data analysis plans.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the design and methodology used in this present study. Specifically, this chapter provides a general introduction, rationale for the design, the research context, research participant selection, focus-group composition, the instruments used to collect the data, the procedures, and data analysis plans. The chapter will conclude with a summary.

General perspective. Harper & Quaye (2009), Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004), and Cuyjet & Associates (2006) all understood the importance of engagement in the persistence of students of color at PWIs. One promising line of recent research attempted to discover the potential relationship between engaging in college student leadership activities and academic persistence, particularly for Black males (Barker & Avery, 2012; Cuyjet & Associates, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Using a focus group methodology to evoke deep discussions, Barker and Avery (2012) revealed that academically-successful Black male students consistently reported participation in a leadership development program that helped them stay in college and excel academically. Other researchers (Cuyjet & Associates, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2009) have revealed other narratives that support the potential link between successful leadership participation in student organizations among successful Black male student achievement. Most of the previous studies that demonstrated a link between extracurricular involvement and persistence failed to focus on minority, at-risk populations, for example, Black male
Based on my review of literature, Harper (2012) and Bonner (2014) examined the perceptions of academically-successful Black male college students and discovered that many of them that were, in fact, engaged in leadership roles in diverse student and/or campus organizations, which they also reported had a positive impact on their own college persistence. Building on this research with academically-successful Black males, would providing nationally-certified, college-level leadership trainings lead to better academic persistence? Dabney (2010) firmly believed that the topic of the impact of leadership training on the persistence of Black males is something that needs more research because there has been little written on the subject. Furthermore, Barker and Avery (2012) concluded that leadership training was impactful on the persistence of academically-successful Black male students.

Based on Harper’s anti-deficit achievement study (2012), one of the factors that led to the positive academic persistence of Black males’ college students was their out-of-class engagement activities. While Harper’s qualitative approach gave insight into various reasons for Black male academic persistence, it did not specifically examine the potential impact of one type of out-of-class engagement—leadership training. Furthermore, as Dabney (2010) pointed out, there continues to be a paucity of research demonstrating a potential link between student leadership training and the positive academic persistence of Black male college students.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to reveal the personal stories about perceived value of college student leadership training on persisting within college among students (Astin & Antonio 2004; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Komives et al., 2006).
groups of academically-successful Black male college students enrolled in rigorous STEM majors.

The central research question in this study was: What are the focus perceptions of academically-successful Black college students in STEM majors about the value of and impact of completing a standardized student leadership training program on their own persistence and future career aspirations”?

Justification of qualitative/focus group design. The qualitative/focus group design used in this study partially replicated the study conducted by Barker and Avery (2012), which used focus groups that comprised Black male students from a college leadership program in the following fields of study. Creswell (2013) stated that the use of a focus group allows the participants with an opportunity to give historical information about their lives, and it gives the researcher an opportunity to control the line of questioning if the researcher seeks to delve more deeply into the disclosed subject matter. A focus group design has several other strengths:

• Focus group interviews are an excellent approach to gauging individuals’ perceptions
• Immediate feedback and follow-up questions
• Small focus groups allowed for more interaction
• Attitudes and opinions can be probed for further insight
• The small group and intimate setting allow participants to have a level of comfort that may not have existed in a large group
• More cost and time efficient than sending out questionnaires to a larger group of participants or a representative body of individuals
However, Grudens-Schuck, Allen, and Larson (2004) stated that when exploring a subject with focus groups, it is important to conduct multiple group sessions with participants that are slightly dissimilar, to gain different perspectives. There are some weaknesses to using focus groups to collect data. The researcher thereby states:

- Time constraints allowed for the exploration of limited issues
- There were a limited number of participants
- Interpretation was subjective
- There was difficulty in assembling the groups
- One participant may become the dominant personality and either influence another participant or dominate a discussion
- Scheduling participants on a commuter campus with non-traditional students can be difficult

Qualitative phenomenological focus groups are conducted with participants of slightly varying characteristics to allow for different perspectives when crosschecking data arising from a study (Creswell, 2013). This is why this study used three different types of students for the focus groups: students with no leadership training, some with leadership training, and students who had completed a leadership training course.

Focus group methodology can be conducted with large or small groups, but the researcher used a similar size as that in Barker and Avery (2012) with the expectation that it would allow for more exploration of the questions from the participants and would allow for robust responses from the small group of participants.

In the final analysis, this researcher proposed and used a qualitative approach to discover the perceptions about student leadership training in relation to persistence of
Black males in college. All students selected had completed a Black male leadership program that included workshops, seminars, and social events, and they interacted with staff and faculty members, which is somewhat programmatically similar to the participants of the program where this research took place. Barker and Avery (2012) chose this method of conducting research to gather pertinent information about the students’ college experiences and to develop narratives regarding their perception of leadership training and whether it might be a reason for increased persistence in Black male students.

Although the sample of students included students who were part of the leadership program with GPAs of 2.0 and above, the researcher used a qualitative research design to gauge the perceptions of how being involved with the program may have assisted the students in persisting in the academe. The result of this study was that the researchers assessed that the students believed their involvement of the leadership training program led to their persistence related to retention. However, as this study only assessed this aspect of retention, the researcher wanted to explore another area of persistence in addition to retention—the area of high academic achievement. This researcher sought to understand the reasons for academic persistence from a high-achieving group of students who were from the STEM fields and that are typically among the more strenuous fields of study.

**Research Context**

The research setting was at a 4-year public institution of higher learning that is located within a large urban university system in the Northeast United States. Focus groups were conducted during the summer session of 2016 on campus.
According to the 2014 Institutional Demographic Report published by the Office of Institutional Research, the college’s demographics of the 8,400 students who entered in fall 2014 are as follows:

- 65% women and 35% men.
- The majority attend school full time (61%).
- Approximately 65% are minorities.
- 4% are White and the other 30% are unspecified.
- 2,433 students that identified themselves as Black, which is 28.6% of the overall population.
- Approximately 1,200, or 15%, of the total student population are Black males.

Persistence for Black males at this particular college has been challenging for some time. The 4-year (2010-2014) graduation rate for Black students at this college was 8%, and for Black males, it specifically stood at 3.3%. For this same cohort, the 6-year (2008-2014) graduation rate for Black students was 39%, yet the graduation percentage rate of the Black males, in this same period, in this cohort stands at 11%.

**The Leadership Program**

The college offers leadership training for all students. New students are sent invitation letters prior to their first day of class. The college established a member chapter of The National Society of Leadership and Success (NSLS). The NSLS uses standards established by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), and the organization teaches students to be leaders on campus and in the community. NSLS is guided by two theoretical models, including the social change
model, written by Kouzes and Posner (2006), and the servant leadership model (Greenleaf, 1977); and the NSLS suggests each as equal parts of the core of its structure.

Of specific interest were the CAS standards related to knowledge acquisition, construction, integration, and application. The college acknowledged that these were areas that would support a foundation for leadership development in its students. These standards are each addressed through: (a) a speaker series that features leaders from different areas in the private and public sectors, who speak about how they became successful in their career endeavors; (b) specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time bound (SMART) goal system alignment, which uses cognitive complexity in teaching students strategic planning; (c) success networking teams that facilitate networking and peer group support for the accomplishment of goals; and (d) humanitarian and civic engagement through collaboration with members of the entire group and others on campus and externally to assist in various charitable endeavors. The social change model, as reflected by Cilente (2009), states that leadership is multifaceted and stressed collaboration and networking. As opposed to the traditional hierarchical approach, this is an important concept for students to learn because many organizations are now functioning in this way.

Kouzes and Posner (2006) believed that all leaders should facilitate relationships and foster collaboration with others while promoting the highest standards of ethical behavior. This is an important model because it teaches prospective leaders how to conduct themselves. Greenleaf (1977) espoused servant leadership to use one’s passions and gifts to serve others, while fostering collaboration and a sense of community, to create positive change in society.
The mentioned standards, theories, and models, in addition to the college administrations’ belief in the importance of teaching leadership to its students to create societal leaders greatly influenced the decision to establish a chapter of the National Society of Leadership and Success at the college. As diverse as the student population is, the uniqueness of the program allows for leadership to be taught with various approaches. This holistic approach makes it unique among leadership programs and, seemingly, is a perfect fit to train students to become leaders in the new millennium. However, the college must pay an institutional fee to have a chapter on campus, but this cost is completely offset with a portion of the pending membership fees that students pay to become a member of the chapter. The remaining balance is paid by the national organization, depending on the attainment of certain goals that are met during the year by the chapter. Incoming students, freshman, and transfer students are invited to pay a membership fee to become a pending member of the organization. Pending members are those students who have yet to begin or have commenced the leadership training program but have yet to be inducted. Pending members are inducted after attending an orientation, viewing three video presentations, attending success networking team (SNT) meetings, and after writing three SNT reports that relate to goal attainment. After the reports are approved by the faculty advisor, the students attend an induction ceremony. The students can decide to join the organization as they enter the college; can join at a later date, but this would require that the student have at least a 2.7 GPA and a faculty letter of support; or decide not to participate in the program. The students that join the program may, within the first 30 days, decide not to participate in the program, and opt out. Although
there are a number of steps required to complete the program, students can take as long as they need to complete the steps.

The culmination of the training is the induction ceremony where students receive certificates of completion that can be placed in their individual academic and/or professional portfolios. This event allows the students to have a sense of achievement. Bolman and Deal (2013) stated that experiences such as this are important because “whether they’re to honor an individual, group, or organizational achievement or to encourage team learning and relationship building, celebrations, ceremonies, and similar events offer leaders the perfect opportunity to explicitly communicate and reinforce the actions and behaviors that are important in realizing shared values and shared goals” (pp. 306-307). As a result, the culmination of the process also facilitates leadership development. All of this leads to the conclusion that the program can facilitate leadership development in students. The national organization has documented several narratives of students who have completed the leadership program, achieved academic success, and attained leadership positions in the private and public sectors.

**Research Participants**

After assessing the demographics, the researcher submitted applications to the respective institutional review boards. The application package included:

- the dissertation proposal,
- the certification of completion for the National Institutes of Health training course for research with human participants,
- recruitment materials the researcher sent to faculty to recruit students

(Appendix A),
• an invitation to participate (Appendix B),
• a statement that participation was completely voluntary and the potential participants could change their minds/stop at any time (Appendix C);
• the consent form that had an explanation of what the participant would be asked to do and how long it should take,
• a statement explaining how the researcher would maintain the confidentiality of the data,
• how the researcher would store the information,
• a statement of the risks/benefits in addition to contact information for the researcher and for the college’s Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (Appendix D); and
• the questions the focus groups participants were asked (Appendix E).

After the institution granted IRB approval, the researcher contacted the Registrar’s office of the college where the study was conducted and requested a query to gain access to a list that contained the emails of all Black male students with 3.0 and above averages that had declared a major in one of the STEM fields. Based on the query, a list of 202 students was generated. The Office of Institutional Research & Assessment reviewed the list and identified 48 Black males. The researcher randomly selected 25 students to request their participation in this study. Of the 25, 12 Black male students responded to the invitation to participate (Appendix B). The 12 respondents were emailed further instructions to participate in focus groups on campus (Appendix C).

Those students who agreed to attend the focus group for which they had been selected were scheduled for pre-determined sessions, which were determined by the
researcher, who was also the moderator. After arrival at the designated room on campus, the students were brought into a room where the guidelines for discussion were explained and they were given a consent form to sign (Appendix D). After reading the guidelines and the questions that were read by the moderator, each participant had a choice of whether to participate or not. It was also explained to the student he may leave at any time during the discussion if he felt uncomfortable. Although it was explained in the consent form, the participant was again informed by the moderator that there would be an assistant helping to record the discussion and a digital recorder would also be used. The consent form was then signed by the participant and it was sealed in an envelope with the participant’s name on the outside of the envelope. The consent form within the envelope was given to the researcher so that it could be stored in a locked cabinet within the Department of Behavioral Sciences, along with the other study information, which was eventually recorded and analyzed,

The nine students were each selected from the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math fields. The students were invited to participate through personal contact, email, and/or letters. Those who were selected and agreed to be a part of the focus groups and were given anonymity as a safeguard. The focus group participants were scheduled at an appointed date/time/place on the campus, which was predetermined and did not conflict with everyday events. All student participants received a $15 Barnes & Noble gift card. The demographic profile of the nine participants is described in Chapter 4.
**Instruments Used in Data Collection**

**Interview protocol.** Harper (2012) used a structured interview protocol format and asserted that specific areas be analyzed to assess the reasons for the positive persistence of Black males in college: (a) pre-college socialization and readiness, (b) college achievement, and (c) post-college success. It was Harper’s belief that these reasons would allow for the exploration and discussion of: (a) the student’s preparedness for college, (b) how the student conquered the academic challenges that may have overcome his peers, and (c) how he was persisting at a higher rate towards graduation.

The interview questions (Appendix E) that were used included some that were used in Harper’s (2012) original study. Others questions were slightly modified and new questions related specifically to the students’ experiences in the National Society of Leadership and Success, or as in the case of the non-participants, their perception about the potential variable of leadership in their level of persistence. This researcher obtained permission to slightly modify his questions from the National Black Male Achievement Study (2012) and replicate this study with a focus on the impact of leadership development on the group of students as opposed to focusing on mentoring.

The questions (Appendix E) allowed this researcher to document the factors that students believed might contribute to the academic success of undergraduate Black males. The original study used eight researchable dimensions that were used to ask questions about what led to academic achievement. This study used some of these dimensions to create questions specific to the research. The following dimensions were used: familial factors, K-12 school forces, out-of-college school prep resources, classroom experiences, out-of-class engagement, enriching educational experiences,
graduate school enrollment, and career readiness. Using these dimensions and focusing on the impact of a leadership training program on students that were attending or were persisting toward graduation from this 4-year college, this researcher kept in mind the central question, which was: What are the focus group perceptions of academically-successful Black college students in STEM majors about the value and impact of completing a standardized student leadership training program on their own persistence and future career aspirations?

Using the dimensions and focusing on the impact of leadership training program on students who were attending the 4-year college, this researcher comprised focus groups interview questions used a semi-structured interview protocol for those students who had engaged in the leadership training (Appendix E).

The researcher used the same semi-structured focus group approach. The findings were validated using appropriate research protocols. The researcher addressed issues of validity by using the random selection process described herein, so that although the race/gender characteristics may have given the participants some similarity, they had a random probability of being selected to an experimental group (Creswell, 2013). Peer-to-peer debriefing assisted in this process. Reliability was assisted by cross checking answers for coding errors and obvious mistakes by another colleague in the field of endeavor.

The study posed no ethical problems for the researcher and the participants from the institution or the organization providing the leadership training. It was the expectation of the researcher that the results supported the practicability and value of the
study and would create further discourse on the subject matter of Black males and the variables that impact their level of persistence in college.

**Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis**

The focus group sessions were held on the campus of the 4-year college located in an urban university system. The focus group data was collected through group interviews, which were conducted by this researcher. The students were asked open-ended questions as listed on the interviewer protocol by the researcher. The researcher took handwritten notes and also used an audio recorder and a Samsung Galaxy 6 cell phone to digitally record three focus group sessions. The assistant also took handwritten notes during each focus group. After the interviews were completed, the researcher gave the students a debriefing about the next steps and informed them that they would receive a summary of the findings and outcome.

The digitally recorded sessions using the Samsung Galaxy 6 cell phone were downloaded to the DropBox cloud application. The researcher emailed the audio files from DropBox to Rev.com transcription services. A representative from Rev.com emailed the transcribed focus group interviews within two days of submission.

The researcher reviewed the transcriptions. Using Creswell’s (2013) steps, the researcher hand coded the transcripts. The researcher grouped focus group statements and clustered, coded, and reduced them to themes. As shown in Appendix F, 38 themes emerged from the clustered statements. The researcher then began to connect the themes to the pipeline points/researchable dimensions from Harper’s (2012) study. The results and analysis were stored in a locked cabinet at the institution in the Office of Student
Development, and they will be kept for at least 7 years after the publication of this document.

**Summary**

The college was identified as a good case study to examine the perceptions of high-achieving Black males in STEM majors with varying degrees of leadership training. The strengths and limitations of using focus groups were provided. Nine Black males participated in three different focus groups on campus during the summer session of 2016. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, the researcher recorded the focus group sessions using multiple recording methods. The responses were transcribed using a third-party vendor. The transcripts were clustered, coded, and themed based on Creswell (2013).

Chapter 4 discusses the demographic profiles of the nine students and the findings from the focus group interviews.
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to elaborate on the results of this study. The central research question is outlined, the qualitative focus group data analysis revealed, and the findings and summary of the results are given. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of leadership training on the academic persistence among high-achieving Black male college students enrolled in STEM fields.

The data analysis was performed after outlining the focus group protocol (Table 4.1). The data analysis includes a demographic analysis (Table 4.2) of the participants and lists the super-ordinate themes and ordinate themes that emerged from the focus group interviews. Each section is organized by a data table and super-ordinate and ordinate themes. The first section outlines the super-ordinate and ordinate themes from the anti-deficit achievement framework (Harper, 2012), and each section that follows is preceded with the data table that outlines the emerging themes from this study. The data tables show the frequency of which the themes emerged in this study, and they are followed with quotes from the participants as narrative examples of the themes.

The determinations of the super-ordinate and ordinate themes were decided based on Harper’s (2012) super-ordinate or ordinate study themes. The chapter concludes with a summary of the results.
Research Question

The research question assisted in the determination of the factors that led to the high-achieving Black male STEM majors persisting at a high level and whether these students believed that adding the variable of leadership training might have had an impact on their academic achievement, and in their existing and future academic and career endeavors. Again, the research question is: What are the focus groups’ perceptions of academically-successful Black college students in STEM majors about the value and impact of completing a standardized student leadership training program on their own persistence and future career aspirations? This study also explores more general persistence factors beyond leadership training for Black males in college.

Data Analysis and Findings

The interview questions that were used prompted answers about the students’ perceptions of the importance of leadership training on their level of persistence and possible aspirations for post-graduate work and overall career endeavors. As shown in Table 4.1, the steps and actions performed in the interview protocol were consistent with Creswell (2012). As a result, super-ordinate and ordinate themes emerged during the interviews with the focus group, as shown in Table 4.1.

Focus group interview demographics. The group of high-achieving Black male STEM majors included in the focus group interviews was demographically diverse. They had various levels of exposure to leadership training and were from two ethnicities, various STEM majors, and their academic and enrollment status were also varied. The demographic analysis of these participants ranged from those who had no leadership training to those who had some leadership training, and those that completed the college
Table 4.1

Steps and Actions Interview Data Analysis of Focus Group of Nine High-Achieving Black Male Students in STEM Majors at a 4-Year Public College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collections</td>
<td>Nine digitally recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Each transcription was individually identified. Transcriptions were typed into a database. Each response was linked to the corresponding question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read through data</td>
<td>Transcripts were verified with the recordings two times. Transcribed interviews were read twice. Ideas were electronically sorted into groups, printed, and kept in a codebook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzed and coded data</td>
<td>All responses were grouped by research question. Data were coded using line-by-line coding. Codes were logged, and frequencies calculated in an electronic format. The finalized coding list was printed and kept in a codebook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Themes found in the data were categorized into superordinate themes and themes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The interview protocol followed by both researcher/interviewer and assistant were aligned and in accordance with steps taken during qualitative/focus group research.

Table 4.2 depicts the demographic analysis of the focus group participants.

As documented in the demographic analysis (Table 4.2), most of the students in the study majored in one of the science fields, attended the college full-time, and identified as being of Caribbean descent. All the students posted an overall GPA of 3.0 or better, and the majority was of junior status or above (graduate).

Also of note is that two-thirds of the students in the study had participated, to some degree, in the college’s leadership training program and, as such, had been exposed
Table 4.2

Demographic Analysis of Focus Group of High-Achieving Black Male Students in STEM Majors at a 4-Year Public College (N = 9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment Status</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Training Program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-participants</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pending member – Training incomplete</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inducted members</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* All participants were high-achieving Black males with overall GPAs between 3.0 and 3.5. The mean average for the participants (N = 9) was 3.1. The non-participants were students never exposed to the leadership training program. The leadership training program was divided into the following stages: Orientation (2 hr.), Leadership Training Day (3 hr.), Success Networking Team Meetings (9 hr.), Community Service (5 hr.). The pending members all completed the Orientation and Leadership Training Day (5 hr.). The inducted members completed all 4 phases of the program (19 hr.). The induction ceremony was not mandatory.
to the basic tenets of the program, including: goal planning, networking, servant leadership, and motivational media. One-third of the group had no exposure to the leadership training program and, therefore, was asked questions that were slightly different (Appendix E) than the other two-thirds of the participants about their perceptions of the value of leadership training.

The anti-deficit achievement framework consists of themes that Harper (2012) believed would allow for the exploration of factors that can give insight into the reasons for the high achievement of some Black male students and possibly their persistence. Harper (2012) used several themes to help interpret the experiences. For the purposes of this work, the super-ordinate themes are:

- pre-college socialization and readiness, focusing on how students are prepared for college in their formative years;
- college achievement, focusing on the institutional experience; and
- post-college success, focusing on their academic and career experiences after undergraduate college.

The ordinate themes are:

- familial factors, such as family influence by parents or elders on academic outcomes;
- K-12 factors, or the students’ learning environment in their formative years, which can significantly influence their admission and academic success in college;
• out-of-school college preparation, which is the lack of educational resources in a student’s formative years, outside of the classroom, that could influence the student’s ability to succeed;
• classroom experiences, such as individual professors’ teaching methods that could have impacted the students’ college persistence;
• out-of-class engagement, which is peer engaged through extracurricular activities that can impact persistence;
• enriching educational experiences include faculty mentoring or studying abroad, which may assist in a student’s persistence;
• career readiness and graduate school enrollment, which is explained by the students’ undergraduate educational experiences that can prepare them for success in graduate/doctoral programs, law/medical schools, or a professional career.

The frequency of an ordinate theme is the number of participants who mentioned that theme. In this measure, it can be determined as a level of importance to the participants in this study. Table 4.3 provides an outline for the usage of these themes in this research study.

Based on these themes, the researcher analyzed the data and outlined the findings based on the super-ordinate and ordinate themes that emerged during this study. This study commenced with the super-ordinate theme, pre-college socialization (Table 4.4).

Pre-college socialization. Overwhelmingly, the high-achieving Black male STEM majors had either parental support or familial influence that helped them to excel in academics. Table 4.4 presents the theme of family influence, which was a common
theme throughout the study. Family members influenced these Black males by stressing the importance of faith-based beliefs in persisting through difficult times. Family members were instrumental in instilling the importance of education and creating fact, the influence of family at home and in the church setting was mentioned 46 times in the study.

Table 4.3

*Focus Group of Nine High-Achieving Black Male Students in STEM Majors at a 4-Year Public College Super-Ordinate/Ordinate Themes From the Anti-Deficit Framework*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-Ordinate Theme</th>
<th>Related Ordinate Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-College Socialization and Readiness</td>
<td>Familial Factors – Parents or other family members encouraged educational excellence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>K-12 Forces – Teachers using systemic educational resources to impact learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Out-of-School College Preparation – External college prep programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Achievement</td>
<td>Classroom Experiences – Teachers positively influencing students’ development through classroom interaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Out-of-Class Experiences – Interaction with professors such as mentoring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-College Success</td>
<td>Enriching Educational Experiences – Study abroad, internship program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career Readiness – Preparation for employment after college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate School Enrollment – Attendance in college or medical/law school after graduating with a baccalaureate degree.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.4

List of Pre-College Socialization Factors, Ordinate Themes, and Sub-Themes From a Focus Group of High-Achieving Black Male Students in STEM Majors at a 4-Year Public College (N = 9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordinate Theme/Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Sample Student Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Familial Factors</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“My mom and dad basically told me to go to college; you’re the first child.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents encouraged academic persistence</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Prior to college, my dad encouraged me a lot to study hard, go for it, and reach my dreams.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents instilled the motivation to excel</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“We’re a Christian household, so we’re the ministry kind of people.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents instilled the importance of faith/religious beliefs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>such as morals and ethics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents or other family members acted as role models</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“My dad, he’s able to lead the people.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Most of the students’ parents were first-generation immigrants. Although the parents encouraged education, their command of the English language was not good. The researcher was frequently asked to repeat the question, and the articulation of the answers was not always clear to the transcriber.

Participant 1 spoke of his father being a minister in the church and displaying leadership qualities that he admired. He mentioned his father as a person who “leads by example.” He stated that his parents taught him to “work and just keep moving higher ‘up the educational ladder.’” He also stated that his father was a leader in church and “He was very well respected; and there is so much positive things [that] come being a leader.” Additionally, he stated, “my family . . . definitely helped me,” and he spoke of his church family being considered as part of his “family.”
Participant 3 spoke about the importance of his family in his motivation for academic success. He stated: “I’ve got two girls, and I need to set a structure that my girls can come into. . . . Kids don’t know what you are worth until they get to, like, 12 [years of age].” He remarked,

You’ve got this whole time to establish yourself to get something done. With that mentality in mind of me wanting to obtain something for my daughters now, it makes me work even harder. . . . Education is the key to a lot of stuff. . . . You really want a good career, no matter how good you are, somewhere down the line, they are going to be like, okay, do you have a degree?

Participant 4 stated: “My mother has been influencing me to go to college . . . since I was born.” He came from a single-parent household with a strong faith-based family unit. His mother made sure that they participated in their church community, and he made reference to his belief and the importance of church influence in the academic success of Black males.

Participant 5 stated that his parents were “always encouraging me to pursue that goal of getting a college education,” even though they never attended college. “They’ve been supportive and encouraging.”

Participant 6, who had strong parental support, also, stated that his parents were “very motivating” and made sure that they stressed academic achievement. He was extremely proud of his grandparents and father being leaders in the church, and he had also become a leader in the church. He stated that he “grew up in a Christian household” and his family would “go to church every Sunday.” His church pastor was his “role model,” as he had a Ph.D., so he “was motivated to make something of myself” in
relation to his academics. He stated of his family, “We’re a Christian household, so we’re the ministry kind of people”; speaking again to the importance of faith in his family in the discussion about how his family encouraged and supported him in his academic achievement.

Participant 7 affirmed parental support when he stated, “My mom and dad basically told me to go to college; you’re the first child”; and he recognized his responsibility to be a positive role model to his younger siblings and to get a degree. In case they died, “and he had to be able to provide for my little siblings.” He also mentioned that his parents were very involved in the church, and his mother was in the church choir and brought him with her to church regularly.

Participant 8 came from a strong religious background in a two-parent household and stated “Prior to college, my Dad encouraged me a lot to study hard, go for it, and reach my dreams; and he also gave me financial support.” Participant 8 also stated, “My dad, he’s able to lead the people [in his church community]” and “that motivates me.”

Participant 9 stated his cousin, who is a doctor, was a “source of motivation . . . to go to college.” For most of the Black male participants, family and the influence of their family in their religious beliefs had been influential in their motivation to achieve and be successful in all areas of their lives, which included academic persistence.

This ordinate theme was discussed in response to questions by eight of the nine participants. This affirms the importance of this theme as a motivating factor in the role of Black male academic persistence.

The next super-ordinate and ordinate themes (Table 4.5) examined the factors that could impact Black males and their preparation for college success.
Pre-college readiness. These high-achieving Black male STEM majors stressed the importance of pre-college readiness/K-12 forces as key in their pursuit of academic excellence. Table 4.5 presents the ordinate theme which was only mentioned by three participants, but they were vociferous in their belief that pre-college readiness can be a key factor in Black male persistence. It also was one of the factors to emerge from the theme of “challenges to Black male persistence” because the lack of supportive teachers or the lack of a supportive learning environment can affect Black male persistence.
As a case in point, Participant 3 stated, of his early education in the country of Jamaica, “Caribbean teaching is much better; I can say that from experience.” He credited his preparation for college to his foundation in Jamaica and in the K-12 years in this country. He recounted:

In middle school, they had this one guy, a really good guy; his name was Mr. Johnson, our teacher. He was really all about the kids; all about helping you...

He would also tell you if you are doing some knucklehead stuff. He was so into kids. The kids and I remember some situations where he was crying; a grown man crying over the kids not doing something (relating to their studies).

The researcher probed by asking if this made an impact and he responded, “You got to get people that really care about the community, who care about the kids, because those are the people that are going to make a difference.”

Participant 4 stated that, “in high school, there were Black male professors that taught in the STEM fields and they encouraged him ‘to keep going’” in chemistry and that it was a “good field; there’s always going to be jobs.” He spoke about a Black male teacher, and said that he was “a very great teacher; taught AP English.” He stated that it really made an impact on him when this professor gave back the grades and everyone received the minimum passing grade. The teacher stated with a smile, “you guys are smart, but you’re just lazy.” He believed that it was because “there were a lot of Black males in the class” that he made this comment.

Participant 6 spoke glowingly about the opportunity to have gone through a College Now program in high school, which was part of a small pre-med learning community of students. He stated the following:
At Hillcrest High School, we had small learning communities, and I was in a small learning community pre-med, so they gave us an opportunity to take certain classes. To be honest with you, I didn’t even know the lasting effect that it would have . . . but I’m glad I did it anyway. When I came here, I looked at my transcript, and I was, like, “Oh, I took that course; already done with that.”

Participant 6 also informed that his early childhood was spent in predominantly White schools, in programs where he was placed with other intellectually gifted children. He believed this was a key factor in his academic persistence. This reinforced the belief that college preparatory programs could play a key role in the persistence of Black male students. His supportive learning environment in his formative years gave him a foundation for academic success, and he believed his high school environment helped him to become goal oriented and eased his transition into college, while also earning him college credits.

The theme of pre-college readiness/K-12 forces was only mentioned by three participants, but the researcher believes its importance cannot be understated as a factor in the academic persistence of these students.

The next section introduces the super-ordinate and ordinate themes that may have impacted these high-achieving Black male STEM majors, but instead of it affecting them, it became an indication of their conviction to overcome any deficits and persist. The Schott Foundation (Beaudry, 2015) outlined the lack of educational resources in predominantly minority school districts. The lack of advanced-standing classes and college preparation courses can impact the admission and persistence of Black males seeking to attend college. Table 4.6 gives a description of these ordinate themes, which
refer to the lack of resources that these students have access to, and that could be have been a deterrent to the persistence of these high-achieving Black males.

**Pre-college readiness/out-of-school prep resources.** Black male STEM majors perceived the lack of in-school and out-of-class college preparatory resources to be a negative factor in successfully persisting through college graduation. These themes emerged as negative factors in the study. None of the participants mentioned having advanced-standing courses or out-of-class preparatory courses coinciding with preparation for the New York State Academic Regents exams in the STEM fields or as preparation for STEM majors in college. Participant 6 stated,

> When I was in high school, when it was time for SAT prep, I had to do it by the book. A teacher stated, “I feel bad for you guys, because you’re at a disadvantage, as compared to students in the suburbs.” They’re in a better atmosphere, more time for preparation, you guys don’t have that.” She spoke of the lack of resources for these students.

Participant 4 stated that despite support he received in K-12, he was still at a disadvantage in college, because one of his college physics professors stated that much of what he was learning, he “should have known in high school; this is easy stuff. . . . But I guess she just didn’t know that I was raised in the kind of school district where I never learned Physics.”
### Table 4.6

**List of Pre-College Readiness/Out-of-School Prep Resources of Super-Ordinate and Ordinate Themes From a Focus Group of High-Achieving Black Male Students in STEM Majors at a 4-Year Public College (N = 9)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordinate Theme/Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Sample Student Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-College Readiness/Out-of-School Prep Resources</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“When I was in high school, when it was time for SAT prep, I had to do it by the book.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External SAT, ACT, Regents prep courses are needed to assist the learning development of students in preparation for college</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“I was raised in the kind of school district where I never learned Physics.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Standings Courses in the STEM majors such as Regents, science, and mathematics are necessary for students to develop the skills to pass these tests and provide an academic foundation for admissions review by colleges and the students’ subsequent academic persistence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was only mentioned by two participants, but studies such as that conducted by the Schott Foundation (Beaudry, 2015) show that the lack of college preparatory resources may impact Black males’ ability to gain admittance and persist in college.

Table 4.7 highlights this ordinate theme, and in the perception of some of these students, it was important to note the perception that faculty members have may play a role in their efforts to successfully persist in college.
Table 4.7

*List of College Achievements/Classroom Experience of Super-Ordinate and Ordinate Themes From a Focus Group of High-Achieving Black Male Students in STEM Majors at a 4-Year Public College (N = 9)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordinate Theme/Sub-theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Sample Student Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Experiences</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“I have a professor who, it’s like exactly what he’s doing right now is what I want to do.” “He has given me advice and tips on what to do, especially in the field of Psychology. I really appreciate that and the fact that he took the time to do that is helpful.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional faculty support in the STEM majors within the classroom setting can assist with students’ persistence in the STEM fields</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“I would feel much better talking to somebody of my own race.” “But yeah, having Black faculty that are willing to mentor, it can happen.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty mentors can be helpful to students as the seek guidance and support with classwork and career aspirations in the STEM fields</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**College achievement/classroom experiences.** Black male STEM majors reported mixed reactions regarding the role of faculty support and the impact the classroom experience. A few of the participants discussed the importance of faculty in their persistence. College faculty members inspired or encouraged them in their studies.

Participant 3 spoke about having Black faculty members willing to mentor Black males in college. He stated, “I would feel much better talking to somebody of my own race” and mused about how having faculty members willing to mentor might have been helpful when he said, “But, yeah, having Black faculty that are willing to mentor, it can
happen.” He also stated his perception of this was “because some teachers will see the Black students and they will look down on them without even knowing.”

However, it appears that support from professors, regardless of their ethnicity assisted in their persistence. Participant 4 informed that a college professor who was not Black helped the students at the college where this study was conducted. Participant 4 stated that, “he taught us like we were his own kids; it made me want to learn more. . . . He talks to me with care and he influenced me to be a leader.”

Participant 6 reported that “I have a professor who, it’s like, [he is] exactly what he’s doing right now is what I want to do.” Additionally, he said, “He has given me advice and tips on what to do, especially in the field of psychology. I really appreciate that and the fact that he took the time to do that is helpful.”

Participant 9 reported on a professor who was not Black, who believed in his mathematics ability to tutor other students and supported his hiring as a tutor for the mathematics lab. “He was very helpful. . . . If someone sees something in me, they tell me okay [and] try to encourage me with something, I’m going to go for it. But it has to be in a positive way.” He said the professor would bring him students to tutor and say, “I have confidence in you. I know you can do it.” The professor would sometimes start tutoring the class, and then let him finish the tutoring session. In asking about faculty members and/or institutional agents who have possibly encouraged leadership, he also stated, “I would say he’s the one who can see that [I have] leadership skills.”

Although this theme was only mentioned four times, the findings do provide the perspective that some of the Black male participants believed that they had been
positively impacted by the support of faculty members at this institution, and it was encouraging to them in their pursuit of academic persistence.

The addition of the variable leadership training was based on the theory that there is a gap in the literature regarding the area of student engagement and leadership training. The next ordinate theme gives insight into whether this variable can possibly be used to impact Black male collegiate academic persistence (Table 4.8).

Table 4.8

*List of College Achievement/Out-of-Class Engagement – Super-Ordinate and Ordinate Themes From a Focus Group of High-Achieving Black Male Students in STEM Majors at a 4-Year Public College (N = 9)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordinate Theme/Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Sample Student Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-Class Engagement</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Training Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success Networking Teams – Groups of students that provide peer support to each other in the development and completion of goals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“At the SNT meeting, all these hardworking, determined people; it feels like we can do anything.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each student must submit reports of how they plan to accomplish their goals using the SMART Goal System</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“I learned about short-term goals and long-term goals. My short-term goals were having classes and then my long-term goals [were] being a computer science student.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational Videos – Videos of successful people in the private sector discussing the keys to their success</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Those videos we see of people who give motivational speeches and things like that, they’re always talking about keep going, going further.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational Newsletters – Outlining stories of success and providing inspirational quotes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“It talks about how to live your goals and also how to do more to help society.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Organization – Serving as a leader in a student organization</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I think it’s very beneficial to have that exposure in a leadership position.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
College achievement/out-of-class engagement. Of the nine Black male STEM majors, six reported that out-of-class engagement, specifically involvement in a collegiate leadership training program or in taking on a leadership role in a student organization, can positively impact academic persistence. Table 4.8 depicts the essence of what was captured in the discussions with the Black male STEM majors regarding the potential academic benefits of leadership or participating in a leadership training program. It is important to note that six of the participants were, to varying degrees, involved in the leadership training program. The degrees of leadership training ranged from having some leadership training to those who completed the leadership training program. It might be expected that these students would be able to discuss the value of leadership training, but the perceptions expressed by those who had not gone through the leadership training program (Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 3) also suggest that they may have been unclear regarding the value it could possibly have in their existing academic situation.

Participant 1 informed that he became a leader in a student club and he said of being a leader:

It brings exposure; you’re exposed to a different level of . . . I want to say authority, but a different level of people that can help you. For example, professors, you get close to them and they will know you and they can see opportunities.”

He suggested this could be true when they know of “jobs” or “internships.” “They will know your face.” He said that a professor may say, “Hey, what’s up, I know you. . . . I
think it’s very beneficial to have that exposure in a leadership position” in a student organization in college.

The participants who were involved with the leadership training program all had a perspective relating to the training that they had undergone. Participant 5 stated his reason for joining the leadership training program was “I thought about the different opportunities that they could give me, set me on my path to things, I want to do in the future.” He cited “networking opportunities” for peer support with other students as another reason he wanted to belong to the group. Participant 5 also discussed networking opportunities with the students who were part of his Success Networking Team (SNT) as motivational. “At the SNT meeting, all these hardworking determined people; it feels like we can do anything.”

Participant 6 stated “Through the leadership (training program), it has told me don’t settle for anything less than the best, it has helped me to see my potential.” He said “anything lower than a 3.0, at the present moment, would not be his best.” This was a definitive statement about the connection to the leadership program and his grades. Participant 6 also discussed the motivational videos in the leadership training program. Those videos we see of people who give motivational speeches and things like that. They’re always talking about keep going, go further. There’s so much out there for you to do, and I’m at a place right now, I just don’t want to stop; especially with the profession that I want to go into. It requires a master’s degree, Ph.D. I’m just at the place right now where I’m an open receptor ready to receive all the knowledge that I can and I’m grateful for that. I know a lot of people aren’t like that, which is unfortunate.
Participant 7, Participant 8, and Participant 9 were all inducted after completing the leadership training program. Participant 7 stated about his SNT group, “We actually talked about basically classes; what we have to do to do well in college and also to graduate. For me, that actually helped a lot. . . . We could go to members of the group” if anyone needed help and stated “that would actually help us out a lot.” He mentioned that students in the SNT would support each other when they would “give advice on how to help them improve in their studies.”

Participant 8 stated that learning the SMART Goal System helped him, and he stated, “I learned about short-term goals and long-term goals. My short-term goals were having classes, and then my long-term goals being a computer science student. It transformed my life and work.” He also spoke about the weekly motivational newsletter. He stated “You have to live life. It talks about how to live your goals and also how to do more to help society.”

Participant 9, who was the only graduate in the focus group, stated that when he became a member of the leadership training program, he was a newly arrived immigrant from the West Indies, and the organization gave him an “opportunity to meet with other people,” as he assimilated to his new home. He stated that his peers in his SNT “pushed me to do better” in his classes. When he submitted reports on his present and future goals, using the SMART Goal System, and they weren’t initially approved, he eventually decided to revise his reports and submitted them until they were all approved, which he needed to happen to be inducted. Through this process, he said he learned that “in life, everything that you do in life, persistence is something that plays a big role in it; it’s going to help you succeed in everything that you’re doing.”
It was clear throughout the discussions with the students that the students who participated in the leadership training program all perceived themselves to have benefitted academically through their out-of-class engagement with other peers, but it was also true that most of the participants in the study believed that being a part of a leadership training program might benefit them in the future. This research study documents six out of nine high-achieving Black males who responded in the affirmative. These Black male students believe that either serving in a leadership position or learning to lead an organization can assist in Black males persisting in college.

These high-achieving Black males also thought about their future career and educational prospects. The ordinate theme *graduate school enrollment* allowed for an exploration into how they perceived their future in the higher academic levels and their career endeavors. Table 4.9 illustrates their perspective on the aspect of post-graduate work, from the perspective of the frequency which was discussed with the study.

Table 4.9

*List of Post-College Success/Graduate School Enrollment Plans of Super-Ordinate and Ordinate Themes from a Focus Group of High-Achieving Black Male Students in STEM Majors at a 4-Year Public College (N = 9)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordinate Theme/Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Sample Student Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-College Graduate School Enrollment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Definitely, I believe that pursuing a leadership program might actually be able to get you into grad school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate School/Medical School Admissions – Leadership Training is viewed favorably by college admissions representatives</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Definitely, I believe that pursuing a leadership program might actually be able to get you into grad school.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Post-college success/graduate school enrollment. Of the nine high-achieving Black male STEM majors, seven believed that leadership training could impact their post-college success/graduate school enrollment. The participants of this study were all focused on how academic achievement could be a measure of future success. All expected to continue their education with post-graduate academic studies. Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 3 all believed that there were factors impacting their self-motivation to continue the academic careers, but they also perceived that although none had participated in the leadership training program, it could be beneficial. Table 4.9 shows the frequency in which this theme was mentioned in the study, but the comments from the participants give unique insight into their thinking.

Participant 1 stated:

If we take part in a leadership program, and you have these qualities, [and] if you’re going to grad school, you will definitely be a plus. The graduate school program may look at your resume and say “Hey, this person has some potential here . . . you’re chosen.”

He also stated “You might have person A and person B. Person A might have very good leadership skills, but person B doesn’t have it; but they have the same education level equivalent. Person A will definitely, I would think . . . be chosen.”

Participant 2 stated, “Definitely, I believe that pursuing a leadership program might actually be able to get you into grad school.” He thought it might even help with scholarships and “also putting that on your resume could help you get into grad school.”
Participant 3 stated, “I kind of know what I want to do because I’ve thought about grad school. . . . It makes me cringe! . . . Being in a leadership group will probably settle your emotions and thoughts about education.”

The remaining participants had all been part of the leadership training program. These high-achieving Black male STEM majors shared their thoughts about how leadership training could impact their future academic aspirations. Participant 4 stated, “I definitely think this program would influence you to get a master’s, because it can help you gain success, and then with that success, you will be able to lead others; and lead others to success.”

Participant 6 stated, “It will probably help me to get into graduate school.” He also stated, “When they see leadership, oh yeah, that will be helpful.” Participant 7 stated, “I think that it will help me in my doctorate degree and any other further education.” Participant 7 also spoke about learning SMART Goal System. He referred to goal planning and believed it was partially because of the structure of the Leadership Society that teaches discipline and focus and the usage of the SMART Goal System; and it had assisted him in his quest to graduate so that he could attend medical school. Participant 9 stated, “Bringing the leadership skill beyond the baccalaureate degree. That’s something I would say I’m looking forward to. I know it’s going to help. It’s going to help for sure.”

Of the nine high-achieving Black male STEM majors, seven believed that leadership training could be helpful in gaining admission into graduate school, medical school, or a doctoral program. In their perception, leadership training could absolutely influence decision makers at the next level of academia. The next ordinate theme
explored their perceptions on whether leadership training could possibly influence their prospective careers. Table 4.10 delineates the frequency of this theme in discussions with the participants.

Table 4.10

List of Post-College Success/Career Readiness/Aspirations – Super-Ordinate and Ordinate Themes From Focus Group of High-Achieving Black Male Students in STEM Majors at a 4-Year Public College (N = 9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordinate Theme/Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Sample Student Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-College Career Readiness/Aspirations</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“For you to be successful in a company, you have to have leadership potential.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment opportunities can be enhanced with leadership training</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“You’re trying to learn skills and to be a leader, so they’ll see you do that job in school. They’ll say “Hey there’s a potential projection to be a part of my company.””</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Skills – Skills that may be learned through leadership training and may be viewed as assets to a future employer</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“I heard there’s a lot of connections that I can get that can also help me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking Opportunities can be enhanced through leadership training</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“The leadership (program) stressed communication with others through the Success Networking Teams.” “The job market is looking for people who know all these skills.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Post-college success/career readiness. Of the nine high-achieving Black male STEM majors, eight believed leadership training could possibly impact their post-college success/career readiness. The final ordinate theme pertains to the career aspirations of
the Black male participants. Regarding the aspect of their future career aspirations and whether leadership training could, indeed impact their opportunities for employment after graduation, the students were very clear. Eight of the respondents informed the researcher on their thoughts regarding their future academics and the impact of leadership training on assisting their prospects of gaining future employment. The only participant who did not respond had never received leadership training, and he perhaps may not have understood the value of leadership training in his future career aspirations.

Participant 1 perceived that prospective employers might believe that students involved with leadership training in college may think, “You’re trying to learn skills and to be a leader, so they’ll see you do that job in school. They’ll say, ‘Hey, there’s a potential projection to be a part of my company.’” He also believed it was important for career advancement, “For you to be successful in a company, you have to have leadership potential.”

Participant 3 reported that he believed that “they [colleges] have a lot of leadership training programs that assist you in job placement after you graduate college.” He also believed that the networking opportunities gained from being a part of a leadership training program could be helpful in job attainment. Participant 3 stated:

I know some people that finished school and their credentials are just the degree. When they go to some of the places [to interview for a job], they have person X that used to be in the program that knows them, or they don’t know them but they know that they were in that program. They will extend a hand like, “Hey come on, I am going to pull you up.”
Participant 4 stated that when he got involved with the leadership training program, “I thought about the different opportunities that they could give me, set me on a path to things that I want to do in the future.” He also said, “Everybody thinks that I can put it on my resume.” He remarked “I heard there’s a lot of connections that I can get that can also help me.”

Participant 5 believed that being a part of the leadership training program “you get that type of learning experience and exposure and tips and guidelines and [it] leads to continue to progress to a successful career.” Participant 6 stated something similar when he said, “having gained leadership skills . . . that’s something that’s going to be beneficial throughout your life.” He believed in the value of learning to network for success, and the motivational videos that are part of the training program inspired him with the speakers’ stories of their own successful journeys.

Participant 7 talked about the benefits of interacting with people in the Success Networking Team and how this made him feel more comfortable when meeting people and expressing his thoughts. He believed that it could help him be more at ease when meeting someone at a company and “that should make it easier for you to go towards one job for an interview.” He also stated “After getting to med school, you certainly get a good paying job and [I will] be able to take care of my siblings and also my parents, family, and everything.”

Participant 8 stated “the leadership [training program] stressed communication with others through the Success Networking Teams and “the job market is looking for people who know all these skills.” Participant 9 reported his desire to be successful: “I know I come from a poor family, but I know I have to work hard to become financially
stable.” He stated, “I have to work harder, and through leadership, I have to begin those skills.”

Again, the respondents stated clearly that they believed leadership training could positively impact their future outcomes. This theme was mentioned by eight out of nine students when asked about leadership training and how it could impact their future prospects.

There were also outlier themes. Table 4.11 outlines the outlier themes that emerged outside of the anti-deficit framework.

Table 4.11

List of Additional Outlier Themes From a Focus Group of High-Achieving Black Male Students in STEM Majors at a 4-Year Public College (N = 9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlier Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Sample Student Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to discipline others in a leadership role and be self-disciplined</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“In the leadership training program, they train you to be disciplined.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparent and persuasive communication with others is important to leading</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Because of the leadership training program, I’m now able to talk to people. I’ll be able to communicate well with other people because of the leadership training program.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. These exploratory themes did not fit into Harper’s (2012) pre-set anti-deficit achievement framework.

Outlier themes. Black male students may learn useful transferrable skills by participating in a national leadership training program. Characteristics, such as the ability to be disciplined and thereby how to discipline others, can have a pronounced effect on being successful in future endeavors, and transparent and persuasive communication may
be another skill that could be learned in a leadership program. These were perceived to be things that could be, or could have been learned by participants in a leadership training program, and a couple of the participants believed that people who are taught these skills may be more adept at navigating life, in general, and more organized in their pursuit of their goals. Participant 8 stated, “Because of the leadership training program, I’m now able to talk to people. I’ll be able to communicate well with other people because of the leadership training program.” Participant 1 stated that “In the leadership training program, they train you to be disciplined.” As these were mentioned by only two participants, they were outliers in the study, but the researcher believes the aspect of learning these transferable skills could be beneficial and, as such, were worth mentioning.

Summary of the Results

In summary, the researcher examined focus group perceptions of academically-successful Black college students in STEM majors about the value and impact of completing a standardized student leadership training program on their own persistence and future career aspirations. The findings are clear. These high-achieving Black male STEM majors reported that there are a number of factors that led to their academic persistence. However, for those who participated in the leadership training program, all indicated that some aspect of the leadership training program impacted their persistence or they believed that the leadership training program would positively impact their future career readiness. All were self-motivated to excel for different reasons, but each discussed important aspects of the leadership programs as key reasons for their successful persistence.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings of the research presented in this work. The chapter includes the following sections: an introduction, implications of findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future study. The chapter concludes with a summation of the results of the research study.

The findings presented herein will add to the field of study and hopefully assist scholars in finding a solution to the quandary of Black male academic persistence in college and the factors that these high-achieving Black male STEM majors perceive correlate to academic success. Additionally, the research conducted gives further insight into the question of whether there can be an impact on the persistence of Black males in college through the intervention of leadership training, and what other policies and practices might be used to assist in this endeavor. Additionally, the research findings identified other factors that can impact the persistence of this race/gender, including pre-college socialization and readiness, college achievement, and post-college success.

The objective of this study was to learn about the perceptions of high-achieving Black male college students regarding the factors that led to their academic achievement, retention, and future academic and career aspiration including the possible impact of leadership training on their persistence and future goals. The researcher selected students whose cumulative GPA was at least a 3.0 or greater and majored in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. This study focused on a specific type of
leadership training that was used to train students of all races and genders at a 4-year collegiate institution that was a part of a large urban university system.

The study allowed for information to be collected through the use of focus groups and used the anti-deficit achievement framework that was created by Harper (2012). Harper suggested that research could be performed that would allow for the further study of Black male college students’ ability to successfully persist using the following areas of interest: pre-college socialization and readiness, college achievement, and post-college success. These areas of study guided the questions and allowed for themes to emerge that related to the research question and other themes related to the subject of Black male academic persistence in college.

This exploratory study discovered many factors that might impact the persistence of high-achieving Black male collegians, including: self-motivation to excel, parental support, importance of persisting, religious/church influence, and a supportive learning environment. However, components of a national leadership training program were all seen as potentially significant factors that could assist in the academic persistence and career aspirations of Black males. The objectives were met, as this study concluded that there were several factors that these high-achieving Black males in the STEM majors perceived were impactful upon their level of persistence.

A majority of the participants believed that leadership training can assist with collegiate persistence and post-graduation goals. Positive peer pressure, importance of networking in academic and career success, goal planning, motivational newsletters, and video broadcasts, the SMART Goal System, and Success Networking Teams are all
components of the leadership training program and that were mentioned as factors for persistence by the students who completed the college’s leadership training program.

The perception that leadership training could impact the academic persistence and/or future academic/career success of these Black males was verified in the focus group conversations by two-thirds of the participants. All of the Black males understood the importance of leadership training and the impact it could possibly have on academic persistence and educational and careers aspirations. Moreover, all of the students who participated to some extent in the leadership training program, perceived that some aspect of the leadership training program either had an impact or could have an impact on their persistence and/or future academic/career goals. Although the focus groups were limited in size, and the participants had varying exposure to the training program, this exploratory study offers a good starting point to further examine the possible impact of offering a national leadership training program on persistence and future aspirations of high-achieving Black male STEM majors.

**Implications of Findings**

As a result of the use of the anti-deficit approach, this researcher was able to arrive at several conclusions regarding the perceptions of the student participants in the following areas: pre-college socialization and readiness, college achievement, and post-college success and the factors that might lead to their successful collegiate academic persistence. Despite the fact that this exploratory focus group’s information was consistent with previous studies on the challenges facing Black male academic persistence (Bonner, 2014; Griffin, 2006, Harper, 2012), the use of Harper’s (2012) anti-
deficit approach allowed for some introspection and identification of additional factors based on a stimulating discussion that led to their successful academic persistence.

Based on these exploratory findings, high-achieving Black male college students may benefit from having parents or family members who encourage the development of leadership potential by involving them in environments that provide them with leadership opportunities, either in church or in school. Additionally, there seemed to be a positive emotional/mental impact on the psyche of these high-achieving Black male STEM majors if they had parents or family members who were also in positions of leadership. It seems that those students who had parents in roles of leadership or had been encouraged to become leaders by their parents also had confidence during the interviews that exuded from within them. In short, they appeared to have the drive to be at their best in all phases of their lives, especially their academic life. This attitude begins at an early age and seems to have given them confidence to excel beyond kindergarten through the 12th grade. In fact, these high-achieving Black males believed that their academic success may have been rooted in the support that they received from influential family members throughout their educational ladder. Therefore, academic institutions may find it beneficial to find more ways to fully integrate parents of Black males early and often during the educational process.

At the college level, there were several things that can compel Black male students to pursue leadership and engagement opportunities on campus. One benefit of starting or completing the national leadership training program was access to faculty members. The students reported a greater chance of getting a letter of recommendation for graduate school or other future academic endeavors. There was also the thought that
a faculty member could serve as a reference, verifying past leadership roles and the potential to excel in out-of-class activities. These Black male participants believed that access to leadership training might provide an advantage in either obtaining a job after college or placement in a position of leadership with an employer after undergraduate college, because their involvement looked good on a resume. Their reasoning being that, employers are looking for those willing and capable of serving in capacities of leadership, and this training would foster that thought in employers about the graduates’ job readiness. It was acknowledged by these students that Black males might be compelled to participate in a leadership training program if they understood that their future academic and career goals could be at least marginally enhanced. It is therefore imperative that institutions create leadership programs that stress the importance of leadership training as a factor that will increase the likelihood of admission into postgraduate schools and be viewed favorably by the organizations in which they are seeking employment.

The majority of the high-achieving Black male STEM majors perceived that a leadership training program might give students an opportunity to network with other students and faculty involved with the program. This could lead them to receiving positive peer support and encouragement from their colleagues, and it would also allow for some additional scholastic support from professors (e.g., mentoring). For the students who completed the leadership training program, the belief was that it helped them to learn a degree of persistence that assisted them in their pursuit of academic achievement. This is not surprising, as this leadership training program taught networking skills and placed an emphasis on learning how to create SMART goals. This enabled the students
to learn techniques that helped them with their academic goals, thereby giving them the tools to organize, set, and feel confident that they could accomplish existing and future goals. The value of networking for existing academic goals and future career aspirations cannot be understated and, therefore, must be stressed by educators as a skill that could prove useful in navigating the college bureaucracy, providing critical academic peer support, and in creating opportunities for the meaningful employment of Black males.

It was the perception of the majority of these Black male STEM majors that it is possible to acquire skills through a leadership training program that gives the perception to future colleges that one might have transferable skills that lead to success in whatever endeavor they are undertaking. It could, therefore, be viewed favorably by college admissions departments. Academic institutions may believe that students who have gone through leadership training might have a higher likelihood of success at their institution. It is therefore relevant in the areas of post-undergraduate college success. Institutions must stress to their Black male students that leadership training could positively impact the perceptions of their applications to post-graduate academic institutions.

In the area of being competitive in the pursuit of employment in future career endeavors, there were a few different views expressed by the Black male STEM majors. However, the majority expressed a belief that leadership training could assist in their attainment of a job or career advancement. Perhaps by participating in a leadership training program, a student might have learned a skill that would make them more marketable in the job market. Skills, such as goal planning and networking, can be used to increase one’s chances of employment, gain a position of employment, and/or increase the likelihood of career advancement once hired by an organization. There was also a
thought from those who participated in the leadership training program that the
couragement to be involved in charitable endeavors and volunteer activities presented
an opportunity to show prospective future employers that they are willing to be involved
with endeavors that have no direct benefit and or advantages to their specific jobs and
that could be viewed as positive. They also believed that leadership training could lead to
the belief that they were willing to go beyond the value of directly benefitting and, thus,
they may be willing to go further than their job description entailed to reach their
occupational goals and/or further other organization-related goals. Prospective
employers may be looking for people who can be leaders and assist organizations in
becoming a leader, in whatever endeavor they are focused, and therefore institutions
should emphasize leadership training as an asset to Black males students in their pursuit
of employment opportunities.

Lastly, there was a general sense from these Black male STEM majors that
although faculty members, staff, or other institutional agents could encourage their
knowledge in leadership, and some were supportive of their academic goals, the
overwhelming majority of students received no encouragement from any member of the
administration, faculty, and/or staff to learn leadership skills; for possible current and/or
future academic benefits or employment opportunities. These Black male students all
agreed that leadership training should be encouraged more in learning environments,
regarding the population, because there are potential benefits in the pursuit of their
existing academic goals and in their future aspirations. Black male students, more than
any other race/gender group are seemingly negatively impacted by the lack of
institutional support, which makes the area of connectedness to the institution, through
the engagement of leadership training, potentially beneficial to the student and the institution in the goals of Black male achievement and persistence.

**Limitations of the Study**

There were some limitations to this study. As discussed in Chapter 3, this study used the theoretical framework of Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit framework, which suggested looking at questions that could prompt responses that would give researchers a perspective of what made these high-achieving Black male STEM majors persist at a higher level than the average Black male collegiate that persists at a lower level of performance. The researcher used similar questions in this study but focused on the perception of how they might be impacted by the insertion of leadership training in their extracurricular pursuits. However, this study used only high-achieving Black male STEM majors who attended a college that was part of a large urban university system. More diverse perspectives may be gained by analyzing the perspectives of Black male STEM majors throughout the university, as opposed to just one specific institution.

Another limitation was that this researcher used only Black male STEM major students. The researcher believed it was important to examine this group of students. The STEM fields are very demanding (Harper, 2012), and it was determined that the students who persisted at a high level in these fields would provide valuable information that could be used to assist Black males in fields that may be less strenuous academically. However, knowledge can be gained by analyzing students in other areas of study that may prove just as valuable in tackling this important topic. The results are thereby limited in scope by virtue of the narrowed field of perspectives of interviewing just students in the STEM fields.
In hindsight, there was another obvious limitation. There are relatively very few Black male students majoring in the STEM fields in college. Some of the participants expressed that it was not taught at a level in high school that would allow for their success in college, or they were not provided with the preparatory courses in or out of school that would assist them in becoming successful STEM majors. Additionally, it was generally not encouraged as a field of endeavor by their teachers in the K-12 grades. This researcher could have chosen from a larger pool of applicants, and he would not have had such a difficult time in the selection of a cross section of students if analyzing high-achieving Black male students in a major with a larger pool of Black male students.

The study was conducted in the summer, and although there were students attending summer sessions, the pool of students that were willing to participate, when most students were on vacation, was very small. The researcher did not anticipate there would be difficulty in assembling data lists of students from the Registrar’s Office, the Office of Institutional Research, and the college’s leadership program. Additionally, the process of gaining IRB approvals from all entities proved very time consuming, and thus pushed the completion of this study into the summer months. The process of assembling students would have proven easier if a larger pool of the applicants were available during the course of the traditional academic year—fall though spring semesters.

**Recommendations for Future Study**

**Recommendation 1.** Explore perceptions of Black males from other types of institutions. This analysis could be conducted in a private college setting, with traditional students. Instead, the researcher chose a non-traditional, public, commuter campus from which to conduct his study. Perhaps the results might have been different if these Black
male STEM majors were asked their perspective of the impact of leadership training on their academic persistence, if they lived on the residential campus of a privately funded college. The recommendation for future studies is that this study be replicated on the campus of a private college with more traditionally-aged students, ages 18-23 (Tinto, 1993).

**Recommendation 2.** Use quantitative survey methodologies with larger samples. This study also used only focus group perspectives. Critical insight could have been gained with the use of questionnaires sent to students in the mail and their answered recorded. Depending on the amount of responses, a quantitative approach could have assisted in the determination of the causes for their successful persistence. Again, this proved too daunting a task with the limited amount of time allotted for the completion of the program. An additional quantitative approach would have allowed for a mixed method study could have assisted in the triangulation of the findings. The recommendation for future studies of Black male STEM majors, would be using a mixed methodology.

**Recommendation 3.** Explore perceptions of graduates of leadership training and college alumni. Another recommendation for future study of Black male STEM majors and the potential impact of leadership training would be to examine those who have participated in leadership training, graduated and moved on to graduate school or similar institutions, such as doctoral programs, medical school, or law school, to see if these students believe it has positively impacted their persistence. This study included only one recent graduate; and he had yet to begin medical school. The recommendation is therefore to look at graduates and their perceptions on the impact of leadership training.
This study used a small sample size, but a longitudinal study could allow for research to include a larger sample size that would be studied over a longer period of time.

Recommendation 4. Explore retrospective perceptions of employed alumni in STEM career fields. Finally, a future study could encompass Black male STEM majors who have gone through the leadership training program, graduated, and entered into the career of their profession, thereby gaining their perspective on whether it assisted them in their job search, employment, and/or their successful bid to achieve a position of leadership in their place of employment. Therefore, the final recommendation would be to query those who have entered their prospective fields of endeavor to learn their perceptions on the value of leadership training on career goal attainment.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1. One of the dominant themes to emerge from this study was the aspect of the importance of family influence. Family influence resonated in many of the narratives. Again, eight out of nine of the participants discussed familial influence playing a role in their academic persistence. Whether it was their parents, cousin, or their children, this was a recurring theme. Additionally, the aspect of “church family” was discussed, as some of the participants discussed the influence of their pastors and other members in their church as positive influences. Many of them also discussed the fact that they were raised in the church, and their moral and ethical bearing was an important factor in their ability to persist.

Conclusion 2. As a result of this study, the researcher suggests that academic institutions recognize the important role that families play in the development and persistence of Black male students and, as such, should include a familial component in
all freshman and transfer orientations and also in graduate school and career fairs. The additional inclusion of invitations to all of these events, including graduate and career fairs, supports the theory that they can assist in Black male students’ persistence and support their future academic and career aspirations.

**Conclusion 3:** Black male students could benefit from leadership training that includes a curriculum that teaches goal planning and achievement, such as the SMART Goal System. A leadership training component could be included in the freshman seminar class. If this class was mandatory for all freshmen, the inclusion of a system of application to planning short- and long-term goals could assist students in accomplishing their academic goals and teach them how to plan future academic and career goals. This could aid in their persistence and assist in their academic achievement at the time of beginning college and in future.

**Conclusion 4:** Academic institutions must create leadership training programs that include an emphasis on motivational speakers, networking, goal planning, written and oral communication, and assistance with career development and job placement. Additionally, institutions must encourage and educate students on the potential benefits of leadership training. Leadership training can be helpful in the students existing academic pursuits and also in their future academic and career pursuits, and that information needs to be broadcast to the larger student body, but strongly encouraged to Black male students who have more difficulty persisting. It may assist with gaining admission into a post-graduate institution and also contribute to gainful employment after college. Additionally, the opportunity to learn transferrable skills, such as discipline and communication, make it a worthwhile opportunity to any student looking for self-
improvement. Unfortunately, the leadership training program did not strongly emphasize written and oral communication, and as a result, some of the participants, who were mostly from immigrant families, may have had some difficulty grasping the questions, and the researcher had difficulty transcribing and interpreting the responses.

In the institution used for this research, there are other programs that have elements of leadership styles, such as the Black Male Initiative program. However, although higher-education institutions look for students who are interested in becoming leaders and may train them in some aspects, such as communication and self-respect, but there are no other programs in the research institution that are specifically dedicated to leadership training and use the myriad of techniques elaborated on in this study. Again, this research study focused on high-achieving Black male students that had been majoring in one of the STEM fields, at a 4-year educational institution of higher learning, which is part of a large urban university system. The students who all self-identified as Black were selected at random, based on the criteria that they had maintained a minimum 3.0 GPA, through at least their second year of college. The researcher was therefore allowed to extend the study to include a graduate of the research institution in an effort to gain further insight into the STEM fields, which are some of the most challenging academic majors, and it was the belief of this researcher that as a result, a study conducted with Black males using the aforementioned criteria would yield interesting information. The data collected revolved around a central question of whether these Black male students perceived leadership training could have an impact on their persistence and future aspirations.
The research is clear, and according to the Black males in this study, out-of-class engagement with peers, such as a leadership program, with the proper components, can also be a factor in Black male persistence. Additionally, their level of persistence directly correlates with their perception of whether they will be successful after undergraduate college, whether they are furthering their academic studies or preparing to embark on their career. Further, it would be encouraging if the study in the area of leadership training on the impact of this race/gender population added a dynamic that other researchers would find worthy of research, as to add to the literature of this well-documented problem and perhaps another solution worthy of implementation.

This study was concluded and all objectives were realized. The findings of the study are consistent with the literature review as presented in Chapter 2 and should further reinforce those findings. Additionally, their perceptions may allow for future exploration of the field pertaining to Black males and the introduction of leadership training that comprises components such as motivational speakers, networking, goal planning and achievement, servant leadership, and peer-to-peer group engagement.

Finally, this study focused primarily on students who were high academic achievers and had successfully persisted through at least their second year of college, to analyze the area of retention; yet, it also provides information on the perception of these individuals relating to the ability to persist after undergraduate college. This should, therefore, give college administrators a methodology with which to try similar techniques to assist in their persistence and retention through graduation efforts. Inserting the variable of leadership training may positively impact the educational attainment goals of this race/gender population and assist in their persistence through graduation and beyond.
The implications of this study are intriguing, as very little research has been done on Black male persistence and the impact of leadership training. It is now the goal of this researcher to conduct further study in this area in the hopes of finding more data that will assist in confirming the perceptions of these Black male collegians.
References


Braxton, Jones, Hirschy, and Hartley (2008)


Appendix A

Focus Group Invitation Flyer

You are invited to participate in an exciting study on Black male persistence in college. “Focus Group Perceptions of Black Male College Students on the Impact of Leadership Training at a Four Year Public College”

Purpose of Study: To document the perceptions of Black male college students in relation to leadership training and whether it may have an impact on grade point average and retention.

Eligibility: Black male college students who are majoring in any of the STEM Fields: Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math, have a 3.0 grade point average or above, and are currently in their 2nd or 3rd year of college.

Participation requirements: All selected participants will have an opportunity to be apart of a focus group in which they will be interviewed and audiotaped. The group interviews will take approximately 90 minutes. The interviews will be conducted on campus during the week of April 22-April 30. All participants will receive a $15.00 Barnes & Nobles gift card.

If you have any questions and/or would like to participate, please contact Anthony Andrews at aandrews@york.cuny.edu, or call 718 262-2936 as soon as possible. Participation will be limited to only nine students for the entire study. I look forward to hearing from you!

Anthony Andrews is a doctoral candidate in the St. John Fisher College Ed.D. in Executive Leadership program. He is conducting research on Black male collegiate persistence and the perception of Black male students on the impact of leadership training on the grade point averages and retention rates of Black male students. Participation in this study is voluntary and all conversations will remain confidential. Your name and any other identifying characteristics will not be used in any reports and/or presentations.

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Appendix B

Invitation to Participate in the Study

Dear (Student name),

I write to tell you about a study that is about to be conducted and for which you may be eligible to participate. The name of the study is “Focus Group Perceptions of the Impact of a Leadership Training on the Persistence of Black Male Students at a Four Year Public College.”

The study is being conducted as part of my Doctoral research involving Black male students at York College and the reasons for their successful academic persistence. The study has been approved by the IRB’s at St. John Fisher College (where my Ed.D. in Leadership studies are conducted) and York College. You were selected through a stratified random sampling program, because you meet the criteria for prospective participants. The criteria for this study are the following:

1) You must be a Black male student.
2) You must be in your 2nd or 3rd year of studies at York College.
3) You must be majoring in one of the STEM fields.
4) You must have at least a 3.0 grade point average.

The purpose of this research study is to analyze whether Black male students perceive leadership training to possibly be beneficial to their academic success. If you are interested in learning more about this study, please review the attached recruitment flyer. You can also contact me at __________.

It is important to know that this letter is not to tell you to join this study. It is your decision. Your participation is voluntary. Whether or not you participate in this study will have no effect on your relationship York College.

You do not have to respond if you are not interested in this study. If you do not respond, no one will contact you. If you decide to participate, please call the above phone number or email me at ___________. You will then be sent a letter confirming your participation, giving you the date, place and time of the study.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Anthony D. Andrews, Jr.
Doctoral Candidate
Appendix C

Letter to Participants of Research Study

Dear (Student name),

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my dissertation study: “Focus Group Perceptions of the Impact of a Leadership Training on the Persistence of Black Male Students at a Four-Year Public College.” I will be contacting you soon to inform you of the date/time/place of the focus group. In our discussion, I hope to focus on your experience as a student and the internal/external factors that you may perceive have led to your academic success; particularly as it relates to the area of leadership training and/or development.

The interview format will be semi-structured. The conversation will be guided by questions I have prepared, but there will be time to allow for responses and discussion with others that have been selected to the focus group.

I expect our discussion to last approximately ninety minutes. I will be taking notes with the help of my college assistant and we will also be using a digital voice recorder. The interview will be transcribed, analyzed and coded along with interviews from the other focus groups. All recordings and transcriptions will be kept in a secure location to protect your privacy. After the study is completed, the resulting dissertation report will keep all participants anonymous; no remarks you make will be attributed to you.

If at any point during the focus group interview you decide to end your participation, your input will be noted and your involvement with the study completed. However, I believe that our discussion will prove enlightening and the informal exchange will allow for a free flowing conversation that will be more collegial than formal. Before the commencement of the interviews, you will be given an Informed Consent Form that describes the risks and benefits of participating in this study. You will be asked to complete the form and then we will collect and file it with the transcriptions of the study.

In conclusion, I want assure you that I plan to complete my dissertation study by December 2016 and if you are interested in a copy of the report, I will be happy to give it to you. Thank you for agreeing to contribute my research and I look forward to your participation.

Sincerely,

Mr. Anthony D. Andrews, Jr.
Doctoral Candidate
Appendix D

St. John Fisher College
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of study: Focus Group Focus Group Perceptions of the Impact of a Leadership Training on the Persistence of Black Male Students at a Four Year College

Name(s) of researcher(s): Anthony D. Andrews, Jr.

Faculty Supervisors: Dissertation Chairperson Dr. Janice Kelly Phone: 917 969-3226
Committee member Dr. Byron Hargrove Phone: 973 642-3888

Purpose of study: The purpose of this study is to examine the perception of the impact of a leadership training program on the persistence (grade point average and retention rates) of Black male students. More specifically, the researcher is interested in whether Black male students perceive that leadership training may have a positive impact on their academic success.

Place of study: CUNY York College Length of Participation: Approximately 90 minutes

Risks and benefits: There are no physical risks to participating in this study. Participants will contribute to the study of Black male students and research related to leadership training and development of this gender/race population.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy: Neither names or any other identifying information will be presented in the written analysis of the focus group interviews. Written transcriptions will be stored in a locked cabinet in the Department of Behavioral Sciences for at least three years after the successful defense of the dissertation and then shredded. The electronic format of interview sessions will be stored on an external hard drive and locked in the same cabinet with the transcripts in addition to the audio files.

Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

________________________________ ______________________________ ___________
Print name (Participant)   Signature
Date

________________________________          ______________________________ ___________
Print name (Investigator)  Signature
Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs at 385-8034 or the Health & Wellness Center at __________ for appropriate referrals. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding confidentiality, please call Jill Rathbun _____________. She will direct your call to a member of the IRB at St. John Fisher College.
Appendix E

Focus Group Question Protocol

Background Questions:
Please share your name and subject in which you are majoring.
How long have you attended this college?

Main Questions for participants in leadership training program:
1. How did an adult family member or members encourage the development of leadership skills prior to college entry (according to Harper pre-college readiness/familial factors impact Black male persistence)?
2. What compels Black male students to pursue leadership and engagement opportunities on campus (college achievement-out of class engagement)?
3. What educational benefits and outcomes would be expected from a leadership training program (college achievement-out of class engagement)?
4. Can leadership training can be beneficial in pursuing degrees beyond the baccalaureate (post-undergraduate college success) and/or careers? Why/Why not?
5. How does this leadership training program allow you to compete successfully for a career in your selected field of endeavor (post-college success-career readiness)?
6. What transformative characteristics does this particular program teach that will assist you in becoming a leader in society?
7. How beneficial do you think leadership training will be in helping you to become financially viable after graduation (post-college success-career readiness)?
8. How have faculty members and other institutional agents encouraged your leadership acumen and/or discussed the importance of leadership development (post-college success-career readiness).

Main Questions for participants in leadership training program:
1. Have you taken advantage of other leadership opportunities on campus? Why/Why not?
2. What educational benefits and outcomes would be expected from a leadership training program (college achievement-out of class engagement)?
3. Can leadership training can be beneficial in pursuing degrees beyond the baccalaureate (post-undergraduate college success) and/or careers? Why/Why not?
4. Do you believe that a leadership training program can allow you to compete successfully for a career in your selected field of endeavor (post-college success-career readiness)?
Alignment with research question:
“What are the focus groups perceptions of academically-successful Black college students in STEM majors about the value of and impact of completing a standardized student leadership training program on their own persistence and future career aspirations?”
Appendix F

Ordinate Themes and Outlier Themes

Definitions

1. **Academic Achievement** – Academic achievement is important to Black male’s future aspirations
2. **Academic Mentors** – Academic mentors are important and play a vital role in persistence
3. **Builds Character** – Leadership training may help build character in individuals
4. **Black Male Challenges** – Black males face many challenges that may impact persistence (problems with communicating emotional needs, susceptible to being discouraged from educators, lack of time because of work and/or familial commitments, lack confidence in many aspects of their lives and may be apathetic about life in general). Retention is an issue for Black males
5. **Cultural Assimilation** – Cultural assimilation is important for immigrant Black males
6. **Church Involvement/Religious Influence** – Church involvement may play a role in Black males’ academic persistence/Religion and the religious community from which a student has been involved may be extremely impactful in the support and encouragement he needs to thrive in college
7. **College Preparation** – College preparation (high school advance standing courses and Regents preparation programs) is an important factor in the persistence of Black males
8. **Educational Benefits** – Leadership training may aid educational attainment
9. **Excellent Communication Skills** – Excellent communication can be a byproduct of leadership training
10. **Ethics and Morals** – Ethics and morality are important cultural aspects which may impact persistence; especially when taught that going to school and achieving good grades is the right thing to do in order to repay your parents that have sacrificed much for you to attend college
11. **Employment Opportunities** – Leadership training may lead to future employment opportunities
12. **Emotional Rewards of Leadership** – Leading can be emotionally rewarding when helping others who you are leading to accomplish group or individual goals
13. **Goal Planning** – Goal planning is important and the usage of the SMART Goal System can assist in academic persistence

14. **Graduate School Scholarships** – Graduate school scholarships may be more available to those with leadership training

15. **Historical Perspective** – The Black male experience and the challenges that they face must be viewed through the prism of history to be understood and thereby used by educators to assist Black males in their efforts to increase persistence

16. **Increased Confidence** – Leadership training may lead to increased confidence

17. **Importance of Education** – Black males that persist have a belief in the added value of education

18. **Impact of Educational Decisions K-12** – The impact of parents educational decisions may positively influence the future collegiate persistence of Black males, such as sending the student to parochial/private school or to a school outside of the community

19. **Importance of Family/Supportive Parents** – Supportive family members may play a role in the persistence of Black males. Supportive parents may play a role in the persistence of Black males. In fact, parental figures that are leaders may inspire Black males to lead and this may impact their persistence because they want to be leaders in their field of study

20. **Importance of Networking** – Networking can be important in achieving persistence and future academic goals and career aspirations

21. **Importance of Persisting/Keeping Momentum** – Black males that excel in college recognize the importance of keeping momentum and pushing their limits to create positive academic results (Persistence). Black male persistence may be connected to the belief that it is important to remain resilient and overcome challenges to maintain a high level of achievement

22. **Importance of Leadership Training** – Black males understand that there may be value in leadership training during their formative K-12 years. Leadership training may provide lifelong benefits that may assist Black males after graduation in academic endeavors, career pursuits and also becoming productive citizens in society

23. **Motivation to Excel** – Black males may be motivated to excel to dispel the predominant images of negativity that are on display in the media

24. **Motivational Videos** – Black male’s persistence may be positively impacted by watching motivational videos of individuals that have become successful in their own field of endeavor

25. **Motivational Newsletter** – Black males may be impacted by video news blogs that discuss the individual habits of successful individuals as told by the individual; those individuals do not have to be Black for the students to be inspired
26. **Model the Way** – Leaders inspire others by “modeling the way”, which includes clarifying and communicating values, standards, ethics, ideals which will drive the people for the which they are trying to become an example; thereby upholding themselves to the highest ethical standards and inspiring others to do the same

27. **Positive Peer Pressure** – Black males may be susceptible to positive peer pressure and this may assist in their persistence

28. **Role Models** – Black males benefit from having positive role models in their lives

29. **Student Activities** – Extracurricular activity connects Black male students to other students and this may be complementary to academic excellence

30. **Self Esteem** – Leadership Training may boost self esteem

31. **Servant Leadership** – Learning how to be a servant leader may be an impact of the leadership training program

32. **Supportive Learning Environment** – Black male students may be impacted by being taught in supportive learning environments (Administrator/Staff/Teachers) in K-12 and college. Therefore, the impact of parent’s educational decisions may positively influence the future collegiate persistence of Black males, such as sending the student to parochial/private school or to a school outside of the community. Supportive Staff/Supportive teachers may play a role in a students’ academic persistence.

33. **Success Networking Team** – Success Networking Teams show the value of networking and the group interaction may be important in helping Black males to persist (connectivity to other students who support each other in their pursuit of earning the degree)

34. **Self-Purpose** – Having an individual purpose for present and future goal achievement may increase a student’s persistence

35. **Sense of Personal Responsibility** – There is a sense of responsibility that is key for students that are attending school to support their families and/or setting an positive example for the community in which they were born and raised (sometimes in another country)

36. **Transformational Leadership Characteristics** – The ability to self-discipline and communicate parameters of disciplinary structure to others; transparent communication and persuasiveness; respect for others; patience in deliberation before decision making; displaying initiative in goal setting and achievement are perceived to be what can be learned in a leadership training program and these characteristics are viewed favorably by some Black male students

37. **Leadership is important in the workplace** – The ability to lead is important in the workplace for those looking for career advancement opportunities

38. **Willingness to sacrifice** – Students must be willing to sacrifice personal/academic time to undergo leadership training