

DISSERTATION

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF NONTRADITIONAL AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE  
STUDENTS IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Submitted by

Angela Y. Mauney

School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2020

Doctoral Committee:

Advisor: William Timpson

Co-Advisor: Don Quick

Miguelita Austin

Susan Tungate

Copyright by Angela Y. Mauney 2020

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

### LIVED EXPERIENCES OF NONTRADITIONAL AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE STUDENTS IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The purpose of this study was to describe the phenomenon of nontraditional African-American women's experiences in community college. This research study included the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology, which attempts to make sense of participants' major life experiences. Ten African-American women participants had in-depth face-to-face interviews. The study examined how their experiences and educational goals were affected by jobs, families, and educational barriers. Additionally, the study explored the participants' perceptions of what community colleges were doing to address their concerns. Overall, the results showed that the nontraditional African-American women participants were determined and resilient in their educational pursuits. Primarily, many of the participants had been out of the educational environment for some time and this was one of the main obstacles they had to overcome. The participants were resigned to take non-credit remedial courses at the community college for several years, before taking credit hour courses. The findings suggest that although there were some educational support systems, several of the participants were not aware of the scope of benefits available at the community college. The study's findings show the importance for nontraditional African American females to understand the support of the community college, their own family support, and the support of their faith or belief system. This study fills a gap in the literature concerning grandparents' needs in classes, online mentors, and costs of remedial classes. Work Placement Program (WPP) for Community

Colleges is one program that might foster a support system which would allow students a one-hour credit the first and second year at no cost. In addition, the WPP would allow community colleges to assist nontraditional students with additional financial resources.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank God and my Lord and savior Jesus Christ, I could not have made this journey without his guidance. In addition, I would like to thank my committee members Dr. Timpson, Dr. Quick, Dr. Austin, Dr. Tungate and (Dr. Davies). Secondly. I would like to acknowledge several family and friends whose love, and support was unwavering. My mother and father Robert and Minnie Mauney, who are no longer with me. However, their values and love, inspired me to continue my journey forward. My parents inspired me to study hard, and that anything is possible. I was told to hard work and always read a good book! Mom and Dad in heaven, I hope you are proud of Me! I would like to acknowledge the support and love from my other family and friends, Cathy Stanley, Darlene Wake, Calvin Stith, Scott Davis, Ms. Jean Marie Jones, Valarie Jones, SharRon Jamison, Bree Johnson, Mignon Morris, Jamon Taylor, Rembert (Rem) and Crystal Allen, Wilbur Davis, Vincent Mack and Milo Mack, Karen Allen, and The Mauney and Parks Family.

Lastly, I would like to thank all my Cohort members, especially Angela Allen, Mark Strickland, Rod Davis, (AMDS) for your support through the journey!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION.....	1
Emerging Demographics .....	2
Nontraditional African-American Women as Students.....	2
Community College Enrollment.....	4
Student Advising and Retention.....	6
Purpose Statement .....	10
Delimitations.....	11
Limitations.....	11
Significance of Study.....	11
Researcher's Perspective .....	12
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW.....	15
Education to Increase Earning Potential for African-American Women .....	15
Community College as an Entry to Higher Education .....	17
Andragogy and the African-American Female Learning Point of View.....	18
Curriculum with African-American Women.....	22
Community College and the Retention of Adult Learners .....	27
Mentoring .....	30
Multicultural Mentoring .....	31
Online Learning.....	32
Remediation Classes.....	37
Demographics and Remediation.....	38
Student Parents .....	40
Time Management.....	41
Financial Considerations .....	42
Grants .....	43
Support Systems .....	44
Conclusion .....	49
CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY.....	50
Design and Rational.....	50
Research Participants.....	51
Participant Selection Process .....	51
Data Collection .....	52

Data Analysis .....	53
Trustworthiness.....	55
Credibility .....	55
Transferability .....	56
Dependability .....	56
Confirmability .....	56
Perspective.....	57
Summary.....	57
CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS .....	59
Overview.....	59
The Participants .....	59
Categories Inferred from the Data .....	62
Participants' Support .....	62
Family Support .....	63
Participants' Faith.....	65
Stress and Anxiety while Enrolled in School .....	65
Motivation to Learn.....	67
Community College Access .....	68
Coursework: Classroom vs Online .....	70
Programs and Services that have Assisted Participants .....	73
Outreach to African-American Women .....	74
Having a Mentor.....	74
Conclusion .....	75
CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION .....	78
Personal Support.....	78
College Needs.....	82
College Support .....	83
Implications for Practice.....	86
Nontraditional Support .....	87
Adult Mentoring .....	87
Individual Development Plan .....	88
Workshop Program.....	89
Future Research .....	89
Conclusion .....	91
REFERENCES .....	92
APPENDIX A Recruitment Poster .....	102
APPENDIX B Consent To Participate In A Research Study .....	103
APPENDIX C Interview One Questions .....	106

APPENDIX D Interview Two Questions .....	107
--	-----



## **CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION**

Historically, educational attainment has been considered by many the “road out of poverty” and to a better life for African-American families (Hackett, 2002). Sociologist Billingsley addressed the quest of African-Americans for education through his writings. Billingsley stated that African-Americans have had a deep historical and cultural belief in the efficacy of education and have sought education in every conceivable manner and at every level. He contended that “Education is the traditional opportunity through which African-American families find their place in life. And having found it, they replicate their experience again and again through their children” (Billingsley, as cited in Hackett, 2002, p. 172).

In 2019, the average income for Black women who were high school graduates, but never attended college, was \$36,868 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). The average income for Black women who graduated from college with an associate degree was \$42,600, with a bachelor’s degree was \$46,500, and with an advanced degree was \$52,400 (U. S. Department of Labor, 2019).

According to National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2017a) the level of educational attainment for African-American women is still significantly lower than other demographics. Only 11.8% of African-American women had a college degree or higher in 2016 compared to 63.70% of White women. In 2016 African-American women held 11.0% of degrees held by women, though they constituted 12.7% of the female population. In contrast, the percentages of both master’s degrees and doctorates earned by all women increased during the same period. Within each racial/ethnic group, women earned most of the degrees at all levels in 2017.

## **Emerging Demographics**

There has been a major increase in minority population in the United States over the last two decades, especially with the African-American population. The 2010 Census reported that the U.S. population will be considerably older and more racially and ethnically diverse by 2060 and it is predicted that 50% of the U.S. population will consist of people of color (Jackson, 2001)

### **Nontraditional African-American Women as Students**

Students over the age of 25 are generally referred to as “nontraditional” (NCES, 2017a). In 2016 the enrollment of students at community colleges increased by 14% from 17.5 million to 20.0 million (NCES, 2017a). Between fall 2005 and fall 2016, the percentage increase in the number of students enrolled in degree-granting institutions was higher for students under age 25 than for older students; and this pattern is expected to continue in the coming years. The enrollment of students under age 25 increased by 15% from 2005 to 2016, while the enrollment of those age 25 and over increased by 13%. From 2015 to 2026, NCES projects the increase for students under age 25 to be 17%, compared with 8% for students age 25 and over (NCES, 2017a).

One of the cohorts present on community college campuses is the single nontraditional African-American female. African-American females comprised 11% of the enrollees at two-year colleges in the fall of 2016, compared with 64% at four-year colleges (Snyder & Dillow, 2017). According to Hackett (2002), 58% of nontraditional African-American women returning to community college come from households led by women. Older African-American students are more likely than younger students to be working, married, caring for children and less engaged with traditional-age students in the college (Horn & Carroll, 1996). They are also more likely to attend part-time, to enroll in an occupational certificate program rather than an

academic program, or to seek an occupational certificate rather than pursue an associate degree or transfer to a four-year institution (Bailey, Alfonso, Scott, & Leinbach, 2003).

Wilsey (2013) administered a survey to adult students with children enrolled in a women's university, primarily in the evening or weekend program. The mothers were between 18 and 59 years of age and were mainly African American (46%) or non-Hispanic Caucasian (39%). Sixty-eight percent of adult mothers worked full-time, compared with 21% of younger mothers who were traditional college-age students. The most common reason for mothers to return to higher education was to improve their working situation, such as changing careers or obtaining better jobs. The second most common reason was to finish the degree they had started. In addition, 17 mothers indicated that they decided to go to school to provide better lives for their families. Adult student mothers emphasized personal and academic goals for completing a degree, while younger mothers focused on increased earning potential for their family.

Callan, Ewell, Finney, and Jones (2007) called attention to the fact that nontraditional African-American female students “are still only three-quarters as likely to complete a degree as their white counterparts” (pp. 20-21). One of the primary reasons for this disparity was financial resources. The U.S. Census Bureau (2017a) stated that the average African-American family's income (with a husband) is \$40,258, versus \$63,188 for White families. The Census data also showed that almost 1 in 4 Black households lives in poverty. The poverty rate among African Americans (22%) is more than double the poverty rate among whites (9%). African Americans have the lowest earnings of any racial group by far. While median household income for African Americans was just over \$40,000 last year, it was over \$47,000 for Latinos, over \$65,000 for whites and over \$81,000 for Asian American households.

According to Department U.S. Census Bureau (2017b) the average annual growth in wages was only 0.3% between January 1989 and January 2017. The cost to attend a university increased nearly eight times faster than wages did. While the cost of a four-year degree exploded to \$104,480, real median wages only went from \$54,042 to \$59,039 between 1989 and 2017. African-American female students and their families must devote an increasing share of their income and borrow more to pay for a year of college education at almost all public two-year campuses (NCES, 2017b). Only the wealthiest of American families are exempt from declining college affordability. It is no coincidence that during these years of declining affordability, U.S. college access rates have flattened, and the gap in rates of college attendance between low-income African-American families has persisted (Callan et al., 2007). Family income remains the best predictor of who will go to college and what college they will attend. Declining affordability is clearly a critical factor in these choices. All families experienced issues of college affordability, particularly the low -income African-American family. With the rate of increase in the price of college has far outstripped price increases in other sectors of the economy, even health care (Callan et al., 2007).

### **Community College Enrollment**

Research shows community college student enrollment has increasingly become broader and more diverse in terms of age and ethnicity. For example, roughly three-quarters of economically disadvantaged minority and first-generation students--categories that frequently overlap begin their college careers in community colleges (Tinto, 2004). Approximately 70,000 African-Americans have had the opportunity to seek higher education because of community colleges.

Community colleges play a crucial role in American higher education. Their open admission policy, coupled with low tuition and geographic proximity to home, makes them an important pathway to postsecondary education for many students, especially first-generation college students and those who are from low-income families, as well as adults returning to school to obtain additional training or credentials. In fall 2014, 42% of all undergraduate students and 25% of all full-time undergraduate students were enrolled in community colleges. According to a recent report from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), nearly half (46%) of all students who completed a degree at a four-year institution in 2014 transferred from a community college (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015).

Despite the lower costs of attendance in community colleges, the income profile of students in this sector makes financial aid crucial for their access and success. Federal Pell Grants are the foundation of this aid and students in community colleges receive a much larger proportion of the funding of this program than of other types of federal aid. In 2013-14, when they constituted over 40% of total undergraduate students and about a quarter of full-time undergraduate students, community college students received 36% of Pell Grants, but only 23% of Federal Supplemental Education Opportunity Grant (FSEOG) aid, 18% of Federal Work-Study funding, 16% of Subsidized, and 7% of Unsubsidized Stafford Loan (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015)

Community college students tend to be older than undergraduates overall. Data from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) show that in 2011-14, about 20% of the lower-level (first or second year) undergraduate students in the public and private nonprofit four-year sectors were 25 or older, compared to 44% in the public two-year sector and 59% in the for-profit sector (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015).

Many of the degree-seeking students, however, will fail to earn an associate degree or transfer to a four-year institution. The current degree completion rate at community colleges is just 28%, meaning that nearly three-quarters of all two-year college attendees fail to earn a degree within 150% of the expected normal time to completion (Snyder & Dillow, 2017).

Grad-Edge (2012) reported that the community college plays a significant role for students who are underrepresented in higher education. For example, community colleges enroll a higher percentage of first-generation college students than four-year colleges. Community colleges are also important pathways to degree attainment for underrepresented minorities (African-Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans), since individuals from these racial/ethnic groups account for a higher percentage of the enrollees at two-year colleges than at four-year colleges (Provanik & Planty, 2008). Due to the changing technological job force, and the new economic structure, has generated a need for skilled people with associate and bachelor's degrees. Many jobs in the U.S. labor market require some postsecondary education or training. To effectively compete in today's marketplace, states must have skilled workforces, which will require some postsecondary education or training. (U.S. Department of Labor, 2018) The community college can provide skilled people with the skills necessary to fill most of all jobs in the U.S. labor market.

### **Student Advising and Retention**

In 2016, African -American females earned 40% of associate degrees and 64% of bachelor's degrees (NCES, 2017c). African American women are now the most educated group in the United States, yet they still are paid lower than White females (NCES, 2019). Successful nontraditional African American females' students take longer to receive their degrees, due to family, fulltime jobs and limited financial resources. On average, African American females take

three or more years to complete their associate degree, compared to other demographics which take two years.

Tinto (2004) suggested that to improve undergraduate retention, all institutions of higher education must offer easily accessible academic, personal, and social support services. The interactions students have on campus with individuals in academic, personal, and support service centers can influence a students' sense of connection to the college or university as well as their ability to navigate the campus culture to meet expectations and graduate. An institution that holds elevated expectations and actively involves students in their learning creates an environment where students are more likely to succeed.

Furthermore, when academic support services are linked to everyday learning in the classroom of credit bearing courses, the more likely students are to engage the services and to succeed (Tinto, 2004). Programs that encourage faculty-student interaction, as well as engagement with academic pursuits, such as research, encourage students to integrate into the college community (Tinto, 2004).

Swail (2004) indicated that when students simply go to class and then go home without engaging in campus activities, they are less likely to be retained. For more than 30 years, researchers and practitioners have been stressing the importance of successful social integration for student success. The establishment of friendships with peers, the development of mentors, and connections to faculty members have been identified as important factors for student integration. For students from underrepresented populations, it is important to remove cultural barriers so that students can connect to the campus community (Tinto, 2004). The act of socially integrating into a campus community has been shown to be a cumulative process (Swail, 2004), so it is essential for students to connect to the campus culture early on in their academic

experience. Participating in student organizations and engaging in campus social traditions can also positively influence institutional commitment and retention (Swail, 2004).

Lin (2016) described nontraditional women students as an important population within the larger nontraditional student population. Many women face pressures as primary caretakers for children or extended family, and as a result, often require an especially strong network of support to persist in their studies. Lin chose to focus on nontraditional women students because of their importance in the higher education landscape and to add to the understanding of the way support structures can be leveraged to improve the success of this important undergraduate population. Advising is recognized as a most important support process that colleges and universities offer to help students navigate and persist in higher education. The Global Community for Academic Advising (2016) described academic advising as:

a series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes. Academic advising synthesizes and contextualizes students' educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes. (para. 6)

Proactive, or intrusive, advising has been found to be especially beneficial because, using this strategy, advisors approach students to offer insights and options before problematic issues arise (Varney, 2012). Proactive advising is associated with help-seeking behavior and confidence building among students (Donaldson, McKinney, Lee, & Pino, 2016) and improved retention (Rodgers, Blunt, & Tribble, 2014).

African-American women sometimes experience discrimination in ways like white women's experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet, often they experience double-discrimination—the combined effect of practices that discriminate based on race and gender. And sometimes they experience discrimination as Black women—not as the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women. An intersectionality framework of



social identity theory has been applied to areas where social identities overlap, such as gender and race (Ro & Loya, 2015) or class, race, and gender (Penner & Saperstein, 2013).

Penner & Saperstein (2013) noted that nontraditional students may find themselves at the intersection of multiple identities that include nontraditional age, veteran, or parent; students may also identify, among other social identities, as a female or racial minority or of low socioeconomic status. Thus, nontraditional women students may perceive negative treatment at a juncture of their multiple identities. They stated that engagement with nontraditional women's intersectional identities and the ways advisors may contribute to feelings because of the student's status as a nontraditional undergraduate or as a woman or of the intersectionality of these or other group memberships (e.g., racial–ethnic minority, low socioeconomic standing).

Advising involves complexity with inherently interpersonal interactions that can create interpersonal or intergroup challenges. Not all advisors understand nontraditional women students' identities and strengths or the challenges that they may face in college, and the ways that advisors engage with the identities of these students can shape the nature of the advising experience. For example, advisors may communicate negative messages about nontraditional women through microaggressions, defined as subtle, everyday instances of discrimination (Sue et al., 2007). Microaggressions are placed in two primary categories: a microinsult, which conveys insensitivity or demeans a person's identity (e.g., a White person asking a person of color a question that implies that special treatment must have factored into the person's success, such as “How did you get that job?”), and a microinvalidation excludes or negates the experience of an individual in a minority population (e.g., a White person responding to a story of racial discrimination with overgeneralized statements, “Well, we are all part of the human race”). In

the supervisory realm, Constantine & Sue (2007) recounted microaggressions experienced by Black clinicians in training with White supervisors who dismissed racial issues or communicated stereotypes about people of color. Whether insulting or invalidating, negative interactions leave individuals with a sense of being marginalized, discounted, or rejected.

Classroom research has shown the negative experiences of nontraditional students. Rather than as microaggressions, these experiences were described as *condescending* or *underestimating* such that students perceived the need to prove their abilities or worth to instructors (Kasworm, 2010). The way nontraditional women students, as a social identity group, experience negative advising interactions remains an area for further study. Specifically, we looked at advisor engagement with student identities to determine ways that it may have contributed to students' feelings of marginalization.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived academic experiences that nontraditional African-American female students have at their community college. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What academic challenges did the female participants face while attending community college?
2. What were the external experiences (i.e., work, family, personal commitments) that impacted the participants' pursuit of their college degree?
3. How did the participants indicate that the community colleges could better support them to achieve their educational goals?

### **Delimitations**

There are several delimitations for this study: First, it examined 10 nontraditional African-Americans women attending a community college. Nontraditional is defined by NCES as postsecondary students who are 25 years old and older (NCES, 2017a). Second, the participants were volunteers and had the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Third, the study examined the participants' self-reported experience at the local community college they attended. Fourth, the community college, specific to this study, was in the eastern part of the United States; students lived near and attended the college for at least one year. Finally, the students had to be enrolled with at least 12 credit hours when the interviews were conducted at Arnold Anderson Community College (AACC) (a pseudonym).

### **Limitations**

The major limitation of the study was the sample size. First, of those who responded to the flyer only 12 students fit the study criteria of being nontraditional African-American female students enrolled for a minimum of one year with 12 credit hours at the Arnold Anderson Community College. Only 10 participants were available for the interviews. Second, students were limited as far as availability, as all the participants worked and attended class. The findings from this study cannot be generalized beyond the participants.

### **Significance of Study**

This qualitative study is important for several reasons: (a) many African-American women continue to pursue a college education and community colleges that offer an affordable option (Rose & Hill, 2010); (b) community colleges are essential to African-American women seeking personal support through the programs offered in community college (Belfield & Bailey, 2011; Spence, 2004); and (c) the community college support systems are adequate in their

support for nontraditional African-American women (Bailey & Zeindenberg, 2010). This study provides significant information for researchers who may want to conduct future research on the experiences of nontraditional African-American women attending community college. This study helps to fill a gap in the research literature and provides additional information and understanding concerning nontraditional African-American women's experiences as they enroll in a community college. This could lead to better planning and allocation of resources by the federal government. Higher education may learn from this study how to better design courses and provide support for nontraditional African-American female students. Nontraditional African-American female students may become aware of the experiences of other nontraditional African-American women and this insight could be helpful to enhancing their own experiences. Community college leaders in response to the socioeconomic reason that nontraditional students return to college, may consider provide additional advising resources to support this group of students.

### **Researcher's Perspective**

The nontraditional African-American female student is important to me for several reasons. It is my perspective that the educational and technological divide is connected to socioeconomics and limited curriculum for the nontraditional African-American female student. I have worked professionally in technology for 17 years and taught in academia for seven years. I currently work in Network Security and Privacy for the Federal Government in Rosslyn, Virginia.

In September 2005, I began teaching at a college located in Atlanta, Georgia. I was challenged beyond anything I could have imagined. The first class I taught was Computer 100 (Microsoft Office) with 18 students. The class consisted of 14 females and four male students.

On initial observation, I visually determined that most of the females were nontraditional African-American women.

My initial response to teaching nontraditional African-American female students was of shock and dismay. What I encountered was that 90% of African-American students had a challenging time comprehending basic technology in its most fundamental form (i.e. logging on to the internet, surfing the Web, and attaching documents to files, etc.). Most of these students were returning to college or had never attended college.

I had taken for granted that our society had moved toward a progressive state of education by the year 2005. My classroom experience introduced me to a different world; a world that included nontraditional African-American women struggling to comprehend basic reading skills and utilize the computer. The classes that I taught were accelerated; they compressed a normal semester of 16 weeks into eight weeks. From my conversations with several of the nontraditional African-American students, I learned that it was the first time many of them had used a computer, and that they had difficulty comprehending the instructions of a basic technology class.

Several of the nontraditional African-American females were at a disadvantage at the beginning of their college careers due to the lack of access to technical skills, reading comprehension, and financial resources. I firmly believe the college and other institutions should review their curriculum for the nontraditional African-American nontraditional student. This action could offer a quality education that will propel these students toward success. The U.S. Department of Labor (2018) has reported that women of color have been impacted the most from unemployment due to the downsizing in manufacturing jobs. In addition, many nontraditional African-American students do not have the technical skills to earn an adequate living in the job

market, making it difficult for these women to get off welfare, and raise a family while making minimum wages.

My reason for conducting research in this area was that hopefully it would fill a gap in the research literature and cast light on what nontraditional African-American female students experience at community colleges. It is my hope the emerging themes will contribute to an understanding of how to design courses, create services and craft policies that will support this demographic. My greatest hope is that this study will add to the understanding of the lived experiences of nontraditional African-American female students.

## **CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review focused on the challenges that affect African-American women attending a community college, including earning potential, constraints, online learning, and remedial courses. The challenges that these women experience is based on barriers and support services at their community colleges. In addition, literature was reviewed that considered pursuing education to increase earning potential, adult learning processes, online educational programs inadequate support systems, and financial support.

The literature addresses the value of earning a college education that could open doors to economic opportunities in the United States. The following paragraphs discuss andragogy, technical education, community colleges, adult learners, and assumptions about adult learners. In addition, the literature review will discuss community college efforts to improve retention for the adult learner. The literature review will also address the substantial number of African-American women who must take remedial classes in math and English. Additionally, the literature addresses some of the barriers that nontraditional African-American women experience. Then the next section will examine earning potential. The literature review will provide studies about taking online courses. The final two sections will examine family and community, and financial considerations. The literature will address the challenges of blending school and family; also, the literature will address retention problems due to financial constraints.

### **Education to Increase Earning Potential for African-American Women**

The U.S. Census Bureau (2017a) reports the median wages for African-American women in the United States is \$36,735 per year, compared to median wages of \$60,388 annually for white, non-Hispanic men. This amounts to a difference of \$23,653 each year. These lost wages mean African-American women have less money to support themselves and their families, save

and invest for the future, and spend on goods and services. Families, businesses and the economy suffer as a result. The U.S. Census Bureau (2017a) reported nearly four million family households in the United States are headed by Black women and nearly one in three of these households live below the poverty level. This means that more than 1.2 million family households headed by Black women live in poverty, demonstrating the imperative to eliminate the wage gap.

According to Gault, Reichlin, Reynolds, and Froehner (2014) nearly a third of all undergraduate women are mothers, and the majority of those are single mothers (roughly 2 million women, or 60% of all student mothers, are single mothers; Single mothers in college must balance the multiple responsibilities of school, parenthood, and often also employment, without the support of a spouse or partner. Mothers in the Great Lakes and Southeast regions are the most likely to be raising children on their own—64% and 62% of mothers in college in those regions, respectively, are single. In contrast, the Rocky Mountains states have the smallest share of student mothers that are single; however, they still make up half of all college-going mothers in that region.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) (2016) reported that African American women are disproportionately likely to be mothers while in college: nearly half of all Black women undergraduate students are raising dependent children, compared with 29% of White women and one-quarter of Black men (though Black men are the most likely group of male students to be fathers. Approximately two-in-five American Indian or Alaska Native women and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander women are raising dependent children while in college, 41% and 39% respectively. Student parents—especially those who are single—have low rates of college completion when compared with non-parenting students. Only 27% of single



student parents attain a degree or certificate within six years of enrollment, compared with 56% of dependent students (IWPR, 2016).

### **Community College as an Entry to Higher Education**

Community colleges have been an important entry point to postsecondary education for adults with no previous college education (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). With the growing trend of African-American families being headed by single mothers, the community college is an excellent resource to for these women to increase their earning potential and have academic success (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Belfield and Bailey (2011) stated that a community college education is an especially promising investment for African-American students who study technical, health or science, and math subjects—fields that offer the highest economic returns. Compared with workers who have just a high school education, women who receive an associate degree see a 22% average increase in earnings, whereas men who receive an associate degree see an average 13% increase in earnings.

The U.S. Department of Education (2017) stated community colleges are an essential starting place for older adults to begin or return to school. The primary reason is the cost of tuition. Community college tuition is more affordable than at public or private institutions of higher learning. Many community colleges also offer course credit hours that are transferable to four-year public schools. In addition, the adult student can learn technology skills and earn certifications that are required for the current technology careers. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 2018. Black women with a college degree earn more than Black males with just a high school diploma.

## **Andragogy and the African-American Female Learning Point of View**

Andragogy is the art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles & Associates, 1984). Malcolm Knowles is commonly credited with bringing this term to the attention of American adult educators during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Merriam, 2001). Knowles argued that adult education has been a separate field with a separate theory. He borrowed the term "andragogy" from a German educator to name this new type of education. The first edition of his important book: *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* contains the subtitle, *Andragogy versus Pedagogy*, which sparked much debate in the field. Knowles (1980) indicated that andragogy is premised on assumptions about adult learners that are different than the assumptions of pedagogy. As people mature, they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning. Their motivation to learn is closely related to their social roles and they need an immediate application of their knowledge. Their orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of performance-centeredness.

Constructivism basically holds that learning is a process of “constructing” meaning from one’s experience (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Personal constructivism draws heavily upon an individual’s adaptation to his/her environment (or, more physical in nature). The social constructivist’s view posits that knowledge is constructed through conversations or activities or in other words socially sharing problems or tasks. For the adult learner, the constructivist view has relevant impact. Candy (1991), writing from a predominantly social constructivist perspective, discusses how this view translates to adult education: “becoming knowledgeable involves acquiring the symbolic meaning structures appropriate to one’s society, and, since knowledge is socially constructed, individual members” (p. 275).

One andragogical assumption is that as a person matures, he or she develops a more independent self-concept, thereby becoming more self-directed Knowles (1980). Thirty years of research in the United States and Europe has been undertaken to verify widespread presence among adults and with developing assessment instruments to measure the extent of self-directedness. Also, more recent theories about adult learning assume that the adult learner is self-directed, organizing educational opportunities outside of formal settings (Brown, 2001). By employing a self-directed, independent approach to learning, students gain far more knowledge and experience than expected. The opportunity to learn independently removes the artificial boundaries that define the prescribed amount of learning that should occur. Students are very motivated and frequently go beyond required assignments (Ellis, 2002).

Knowles' proponents maintained that since adults are existentially different than children, the teaching of adults must be distinctively different than that of children (Knowles, 1980). Knowles identified four crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners, with the last two having been added later, that are different from the assumptions about child learners (Knowles, 1980, pp. 222-247):

1. Self-concept: As people mature their self- concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being.
2. Experience: As people mature, they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.
3. Readiness to learn. As people mature their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles.
4. Orientation to learning. As people mature, their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and, accordingly

their orientation, toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem centeredness.

Knowles and Associates added two more assumptions in 1984:

5. Motivation to learn: As people mature the motivation to learn is internal.

6. Adults need to know why they need to learn something. (p.23)

Knowles (1980) introduced these assumptions as foundational to designing programs for adults. From each of the assumptions Knowles drew numerous implications for the design, implementation, and evaluation of learning activities with adults. For example, regarding the first assumption that as adults mature, they become more independent and self-directing, Knowles suggested that the classroom climate should be one of “adulthood,” both physically and psychologically. The climate should cause the “adult to feel accepted, respected and supported” (p. 47); further, there should be a spirit of mutuality between teachers and students as joint inquiries. Being self-directing, according to Knowles, also means that adult students could participate in the diagnosis of their learning needs, the planning and implementation of the learning experiences, and the evaluation of those experiences (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007).

The implementation of these assumptions could lead to a learning environment that draws heavily on the learner’s experience. The psychological and social climate must be one of acceptance, respect and support. Emphasis should be placed on the involvement of the adult learners in diagnosing their learning needs, planning, implementing and evaluating their learning. The structure of the learning process should take full advantage of their rich experiences. There must be sensitivity to the timing and grouping of learning to take advantage of their readiness to learn. Educational programs must have immediate application to take advantage of the adult's

focus on problem solving. Knowles (1980) discussed the process of helping adults learn, which included:

- Setting a climate for learning;
- Establishing a structure for mutual planning;
- Diagnosing needs for learning;
- Formulating directions (objectives for learning);
- Designing a pattern of learning experiences;
- Managing the learning experiences;
- Evaluating results.

Alfred (2000) asserted how andragogy is applicable to African-American learners, using the four tenets of Knowles' original assumptions from an Afrocentric feminist perspective. She asserted that, first, personal experience is necessary to establish meaning and credibility. While andragogy certainly acknowledges individual experiences, it does not acknowledge "the facilitator experience as a valuable part of the pedagogical process" (p. 20). Second, andragogy stresses that for an individual's learning/knowing to be validated, it must be made public, and this is done in a relationship with individuals or within a community.

Third, an ethic of care and a trusting environment are emphasized in andragogy; however, the political dimensions of this environment are not considered. Knowles (1980) also addressed the organization and administration of adult education programs. He recommended the development of semi-independent structures for adult education within the larger structure, which allows for freedom to be innovative. "The best models usually improve the overall institution as changes begun in adult education affect the larger organization" (Knowles, 1980 p. 70). Finally, Merriam (2001) stated that the Afrocentric tradition evaluates "not only the

knowledge that is articulated, but also the person who is making the claim” (p. 21). In contrast, andragogy does not consider the credibility of the learner and his or her claims of knowledge.

When Malcolm Knowles first introduced the concept of andragogy, many educators saw it as the panacea for adult education issues. However, there have been as many, if not more, opponents as proponents. Much of the controversy arises due to differing opinions about the philosophy, classification, and values attached to adult education (Davenport & Davenport, 1985). Many have viewed education as a fundamental process shared by adults and children regardless of their differences. Knowles (1989) himself may have put the debate about andragogy as a theory to rest. In his book *The Making of an Adult Educator*, he wrote that he prefers to think of andragogy “as a model of assumptions about learning or a conceptual framework that serves as a basis for an emergent theory” (p. 112).

Despite all the debate among the proponents and opponents of andragogy, its mere introduction has been the cause of increased dialogue, research, inquiry, scholarly work, and interest in adult learning. Increased interest should be a positive development. Merriam et al., (2007) asserted that, “despite these rather grim predictions of andragogy’s demise, practitioners who work with adult learners continue to find Knowles’ andragogy, with its characteristics of adult learners, to be a helpful rubric for better understanding adults as learners (pp. 278-279).

### **Curriculum with African-American Women**

African-American adult women experience college very differently than many traditional students. Black women who bring to the classroom their roles as mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, and workers in a society segmented by race, class, and gender, have unique experiences that can enrich the learning environment in the classroom (Rifenbary, 1995).

Sealey-Ruiz's (2007) study examined how African-American adult female students respond to relevant curriculum. Their research indicated that adults enter college classrooms with a variety of experiences that they value and experiences to which they wish to connect. Black female students possess knowledge unique to their positionality in society, and they want to apply this knowledge to what they are learning. A curriculum that speaks to their individual experiences and ways of knowing can be a bridge to connect what they want and need to learn

Sealey-Ruiz (2007) conducted a qualitative exploration of the experiences of 15 African American women enrolled in a requisite freshman composition course entitled *Translating Experience into the Essay* (TEE). The study took place at the Harlem campus of a liberal arts college whose courses are aimed at adult students and where most of the students are ethnic minority heritage. The study was based on the principles of a culturally relevant curriculum for adult learners and black feminist theory, notably the work of Collins (2000).

Central to Collins' (2000) theory is intersectionality, defined as a type of "analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape black women's experiences and, in turn, are shaped by black women" (p. 299). Over the course of six years of teaching at the campus, Sealey-Ruiz (2007) observed the positive responses of her students, many African American women, to literature portraying the lives of African American women. These observations inspired the study. Notably, Jones (2009) included literature by black authors in the CYC program.

The women in the class spanned a varied age range and Sealey-Ruiz (2007) noted that many “came of age during the turbulent 1960s” and the Civil Rights movement had a powerful impact on their lives (p. 50). These women became animated in discussions about that era and the black-nationalist and black power movements and shared their personal experiences, including painful events in their childhood. The younger women (>40 years) were most energetic in debates about language and popular black culture. All the women came from poor or working-class backgrounds. Based on their identities, Sealey-Ruiz included works by black feminists and civil rights, labor, and religious activists, black, white, Latina, and biracial, from past and present eras. The first weeks of the course involved exercises in community building, which were part of all Sealey-Ruiz’s courses.

From Sealey-Ruiz’s 2007 study three themes emerged involving Black women and culturally relevant curriculum: language validation, the fostering of positive self and group identity, and self-affirmation or affirmation of goals. The most prominent theme was language validation, followed by fostering a positive self-identity and group identity, and self-affirmation or affirmation of goals. Sealey-Ruiz (2007) observed that the curriculum forged a connection between the literature and the women’s personal lives and gave voice to their writing. An interesting phenomenon was that the older women informally assumed a mentor role with their younger classmates. They were especially concerned about the younger women’s academic success. In many cases, they invoked the books they read in the class, quoting from the literature to encourage them or reprimand them if they appeared irresponsible (such as handing in an assignment late). Their comments were frequently prefaced with, “I always tell my daughter.” Or, “My daughter is around your age” (p. 52). There was a sense of mutual caring and personal accountability combined with collective accountability. The study’s findings reveal that the



approach of integrating students' experiences as an explicit part of the learning agenda fully encourages them to participate in their own education.

According to the NCES (2017c), among Black adults, the college enrollment rate was higher for females than for males in most years since 2000, except in 2007, 2012, 2015, and 2016, when the rates were not measurably different. In 2017, the female-male gap in college enrollment rates was six percentage points for Blacks. Regarding African-American adult students, Guy (1999) stated, "It is urgent that adult educators explore creative and culturally relevant approaches to serving marginalized adult learner populations, because the numbers of adults in these communities is projected to grow through the middle of the next century" (p. 98).

The purpose of Guy's (1999) study was to examine the significance of a culturally relevant curriculum (CRC) to a group of Black female adult learners in a freshman composition course at a liberal arts college. It probed how these women experienced a curriculum that was centered on their life experiences and sociohistorical backgrounds. The questions guiding the study were: (a) "How do Black female adults respond to a curriculum centered on their cultural ways of knowing?" and (b) "What happens when these women are instructed using a culturally relevant curriculum?" This study responds to Guy's charge for adult educators to develop new approaches to "teaching and learning based on the socio-cultural experiences and backgrounds" (p. 6) of adults. The push by adult education scholars for CRC with adult learners, coupled with the unfortunate reality that "education for African-Americans in general does little to connect African-American people with their history or struggle" (Peterson, 1999, p. 79), illuminated the significance of Guy's (1999) study.

The Guy (1999) and Peterson (1999) studies' conceptual frameworks are based on CRC with African-American adult learners and Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000). Research on culturally relevant adult education with African-American students suggests that learners can validate self and group identity and use their cultural knowledge to facilitate transformative learning experiences. Embedded within CRC for African-American adult learners is an Afrocentric philosophy. Similar to critical race theory (Bell, 1993; Crenshaw, Goyanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995), Afrocentric philosophy validates and values the experiences of African-Americans and emphasizes race as a guiding principle for understanding their status in the United States. A major tenet of the philosophy recognizes that people of African descent have had to develop a unique cultural system (ideas, beliefs, and practices) to facilitate their survival in a racist society. Adult education scholar, Hunn (2010), noted that an Afrocentric philosophy asserts that location in one's own cultural center is important. Second, this philosophy combats racism. Finally, Afrocentrism is guided by a set of common core principles:

- Consubstantiation: Assumes that all things in the universe have the same essence
- Interdependence: Assumes that everything in the universe is connected
- Egalitarianism/Unicity: Assumes that the correct relationship between people is one of harmony and balance
- Collectivism: Assumes that individual effort is a reflection and/or instrument of communal or collective survival/advancement...
- Transformation: Assumes that everything has the potential to continually function at a higher level...

- Cooperation: Assumes that the optimal way of functioning is with mutual respect and encouragement...
- Humanness: Assumes that all behavior is governed by the sense of vitalism and goodness... (p. 5).

The Afrocentric approach can lead to transformative learning. Since first introduced by Jack Mezirow in 1978, the notion of transformative learning has been a central topic of theory and research building in adult education (as cited in Cranton, 1994). Mezirow's theory has "evolved into a comprehensive and complex description of how learners construe, validate, and reformulate the meaning of their experience" (p. 25). However, not all learners are predisposed to engage in transformative learning (Taylor, 1998), and many adult learning situations do not lend themselves to transformative experiences (Imel, 2001). Johnson-Bailey (2001) noted that because of their experiences in a racist, sexist, hierarchical society, Black women, as a community, "can use their place along the margins of society as a basis for their transformative learning" (p. 4). CRC in adult education encourages learners who suffer oppression daily to take control of their lives (Guy, 1999). It can be the catalyst for transformative learning as it provides the opportunity for introspection and exploration of how students' firsthand experiences affect their daily existence.

### **Community College and the Retention of Adult Learners**

Community colleges with the highest rates of retention typically employ socialization strategies such as orientation classes, first semester seminars, and student success courses which offer students a range of services and supports opportunities uniquely tailored to the various groups represented on campus (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). The most recent studies focused on learning communities that synergistically fuse academic and social integration

as a means of promoting the educational success of historically underrepresented and at-risk community college students.

According to Thomas (2001), in his study on reentry of African-American female students over the last three decades, the increasing influx of older women returning to school has challenged community colleges to reexamine their missions and programs for this demographic. Thomas defined reentry and returning women as being “used to describe the cohort of women who had not completed higher education at the traditional age but later returned to school while simultaneously maintaining other responsibilities such as full-time employment, family commitments and other obligations of adult life” (p. 4).

In the fall of 2016, 6.7 million students attended 2-year institutions and 13.3 million attended 4-year institutions. In 2018, a projected 12.3 million college and university students will be under age 25 and 7.6 million students will be 25 years old and over. The number of college and university students under age 25 hit a peak of 12.2 million in 2011 and has remained steady since that time. The number of students 25 years old and over hit a similar peak in 2010 (of 8.9 million) but the overall enrollment for this age group declined from 2010 to 2016 (NCES, 2017c).

Thomas (2001) found female students who are older are reluctant to take on substantial amounts of loan debt to complete their education due to their financial situations. Blending school and family is particularly challenging for reentry-college women. The increasing rate of female college enrollment in comparison to the rate for men is due in large part to the growth in enrollment of older women. Many returning and nontraditional women may find the college atmosphere of academia intimidating and anxiety provoking for many reasons. First, because many of these women who are mothers and grandmothers, face special problems in finding

quality childcare while working and going to college. Second, because many returning women students, especially single mothers, must take evening classes to fit their work schedules, or need time to attend study sessions, group projects, or go to the library. Finally, these returning women students must become acclimated with managing their time and family life.

Jenkins (2011) stated that many minority students face additional barriers that need to be addressed. Many first-generation students have difficulty developing a college student identity because they feel out of place among non-first-generation students-and out of place using institutionalized systems created for first-generation students-who appear to know what to do and how to behave without even being consciously aware of what to do and how to behave. Many African-American students are first generation students and, without any prior knowledge of college and what is required of them, they have a higher chance of not being successful. Jenkins (2011) noted that, if no intentional efforts are made to support these students, how can institutions expect these students to be successful?

Guerra (2013) pointed out that African-American women, who make up 13% of the female population in the United States, are making significant strides in education, participation, health, and other areas but there is a long way to go to fully close the racial and ethnic disparities they face. In 2012, African-American women held only 8.5% of the bachelor's degrees earned by women in the United States. This data supports the fact that while African-American women's participation in higher education is growing, it is not yet representative of the overall population (Bartman, 2015).

Bartman (2015) pointed to the existence of a serious lack of African-American women faculty and staff members working in institutions of higher education, and this also impacts the experiences of Black female college students. The ongoing clash between Black culture and

White educational systems has been the focus of pedagogical research for the last century (Tuitt, 2010). Howard-Hamilton (2003) noted that Black women college students face the additional stressors of racism and sexism to a degree unmatched by any other student group, as double oppression (racism and sexism) is borne by African-American women when their subordinate status is assumed and enforced by White and Black men as well as White women. Bartman (2015) argued that, given the complex intersection of race and gender, more attention is needed for women faculty and staff members working in institutions of higher education, and this also impacts the experiences of Black female college students. The ongoing clash between Black culture and White educational systems has been the focus of pedagogical research for the last century (Tuitt, 2010). Bartman (2015) concluded that a sense of community and acceptance, so essential to the continued success of Black women in higher education, has not been achieved because there is little recognized shared cultural experience with the dominant group.

### **Mentoring**

Spence (2004) identified the act of mentoring as “concerted initiative to guide and direct the paths of those under one’s tutelage or supervision” (p. 54). According to Dickey (1997), “[M]entoring is an attractive approach to meeting the needs of students who are most at risk of leaving the university before graduation. It can improve retention rates by addressing some of the causes of attrition among culturally diverse students” (p. 1). Dickey’s definition of mentoring points out the important qualities needed for mentoring students in higher education institutions. Community colleges provide some mentoring programs to African-American women during the initial orientation programs offered to them. According to Stout (2000), mentoring has established itself as a key component in training and staff development programs in a range of professionals.

Bohannon and Bohannon (2015) addressed the very important issue that often mentors rely upon having had similar experiences to gain an empathy with mentees and an understanding of their experiences. Where the mentor and mentee come from different racial or ethnic backgrounds, empathy might be difficult to establish. This study examines whether Bohannon and Bohannon's theory always holds true; that is, is it possible for mentors and mentees who have had different life experiences to develop a successful, empathic relationship? Or can it potentially create an obstacle for a student of color who does not have similar experiences to that of the mentor? Smith (2007) pointed out that race, gender, and power dynamics have influence on establishing and sustaining close mentoring relationships and explained that layers of societal oppression influence the selection of mentors and mentees, and the outcomes associated with the relationship. Race can be a confounding factor in developing trust and establishing a mentoring relationship (Dahlvig, 2010).

### **Multicultural Mentoring**

Chan, Yeh, & Krumboltz (2015) showed the importance of mentors being multiculturally aware and competent, as well as skilled in converting cross-racial relationships. Mentors must be aware of how cultural values shape the behaviors, thoughts, beliefs, and expectations of minority group members (Park-Saltzman, Wada, & Mogami, 2012), and how these values relate to mentoring practices. Spalter-Roth, Shin, Mayorova, & White (2013) stated that White faculty who lack the skills and desire to recognize and deal with cultural differences may aggravate the state of separation and relegation common in the experiences of minority students. Chan et al. (2015) also found that mentors must be conversant with the unique personal, professional, and societal challenges confronting minorities in the workplace, such as discrimination, exclusion

from formal and informal networks, lack of role models, language and cultural barriers, and isolation.

Chan et al. (2015) noted two major obstacles facing ethnic minority students: first, ethnic minority students tend to prefer and report satisfaction with racially similar mentor relationships but are less likely to find same-race mentors, and same sex mentors due to the lack of ethnic minority faculty in their programs and second, ethnic minority students paired with European American mentors have been found to receive fewer overall mentoring benefits and psychosocial support than protégés in same-race dyads. Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby, and Muller (2011) explained that students who have mentors will experience the greatest successes when they match with mentors based on race and/or gender.

### **Online Learning**

The field of online education has grown significantly over the past few decades. Many who had earlier believed that online education was just the business of proprietary or for-profit higher education institutions are now realizing that the growth of online programs in the public and private non-profit sector has been booming especially in the continuing education divisions of higher education institutions. Online programs have become a key offering at a wide range of institutions, including community colleges, as well as four-year public and private postsecondary institutions. Online education has massively expanded access for adult learners, transcending not only distance but time, since many of these adults require the flexibility of schedule that online programs offer. Even with high quality standards, most online higher education programs offer students the ability to log into their courses at the times of day that are most suited to their schedules, so that they may complete their learning in a way that fits with their other life requirements (Brower & Schejbal, 2016).



According to Huang (2000), the online model is the final component that has not been fully researched for the nontraditional learners' curriculum. Huang remarked there are seven issues related to the constructivist approach to online learning. *First*, humanity and learner's isolation, since individual learning at a distance is a basic design for online learning. *Second*, distance learners should determine the quality and authenticity of their learning. Nontraditional learners usually have strong self-direction in learning. The *third* issue is the real role of educators (instructors) in distance learning. While designing a distance course, the instructor should notice the real situations in physical distance with learners (not the same as conventional courses in classrooms) and adult learning characteristics. The *fourth issue*, pre-authentication, is a controversy in the constructivist approach. Petraglia (1998) defined pre-authentication as "the attempt to make learning materials and environments correspond to the real world prior to the learner's interaction with them" (p. 53). *Fifth*, one argument of the constructivist approach is that the evaluation of learners' achievement is time consuming. A *sixth* argument is that constructivists emphasize that teaching and learning should be learner-centered. *Seventh*, collaborative learning conflicts with individual differences. Based on individual differences, adult learning emphasizes learner-centered instruction. Therefore, instructional strategies, subject matter, and instructional theories are other relevant variables for creating a better learning environment for online learners.

Sims, Vidgen, and Powell's (2010) study viewed education as a route to full participation in society and widening participation in education and lifelong learning as a way of including those who are currently excluded from many of the benefits of society (e.g., minority females). The use of learning technology is perceived as a means of widening participation in higher education by enabling participation by nontraditional minority female students. E-learning is

perceived as lowering barriers of time and space to enable nontraditional students to attend campus-based education, while accessing resources at a time and place of their choosing. The digital divide finds some students financially unable to afford technology and broadband access, others without the skills to engage with learning technology, and some culturally less able to benefit from technological enrichment. It also finds gender and generational differences disenfranchising for some students.

Most institutions feel that making more courses available is an important reason to offer online learning. However, fewer feel that making more degree programs available (55%) or certificate programs available (34%) is a key factor, and only a third of institutions offer at least one-degree program entirely online (Parsad & Lewis, 2008). Although access is the key initiative, Parsad and Lewis argued that the lack of government funding is the main reason for the disparity in technology curriculum for the nontraditional minority female students.

Jagger (2011) advocated online learning as an option for adult learners to promote greater access to college by reducing the cost and time of commuting and, in the case of asynchronous approaches, by allowing students to study on a schedule that is optimal for them. This goal of improved access has been one of the top motivators for postsecondary institutions to expand their distance education offerings (Parsad & Lewis, 2008), which has in turn helped drive the strong increase in online course enrollments over the last decade.

Online college courses are a rapidly growing feature of higher education. One out of three students now take at least one course online during their college career, and that share has increased threefold over the past decade (Allen & Seaman 2013). The promise of cost savings, partly though economies of scale, fuels ongoing investments in online education by both public

and private institutions (Deming, Goldin, Katz, & Yuchtman, 2015). Non-selective and for-profit institutions have aggressively used online courses.

Allen and Seaman (2013) stated online college courses are a rapidly growing feature of higher education. One out of three students now take at least one course online during their college career, and that share has increased threefold over the past decade. The promise of cost savings, partly through economies of scale, fuels ongoing investments in online education by both public and private institutions (Deming et al., 2015). Community college and for-profit institutions have aggressively used online courses. Yet there is little systematic evidence about how online classes affect student outcomes. Some studies have investigated the effects of online course-taking using distance-to-school instruments or fixed effects (e.g. Hart, Friedmann, & Hill, 2014; Xu & Jaggars, 2013), but in those studies, it is not clear if other aspects of the class changed between the in-person and online settings.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017c), the number and proportion of college and university students taking classes online grew solidly in 2017, as overall postsecondary enrollments fell. A third of all students now take at least one online course. It shows that while overall postsecondary enrollment dropped by almost 90,000 students, nearly half a percentage point, from fall 2016 to fall 2017 confirming data previously published by the National Student Clearinghouse, the number of all students who took at least some of their courses online grew by more than 350,000, a healthy 5.7%. The proportion of all students who were enrolled exclusively online grew to 15.4% (up from 14.7% in 2016), or about one in six students. The share of all students who mixed online and in-person courses grew slightly faster, to 17.6% in 2017 from 16.4% in 2016. And the proportion of all students who took at least one course online grew to 33.1%, from 31.1% in 2016 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

The evidence on how well online education works in college is growing, but is mixed. A recent meta-analysis by the U.S. Department of Education (2017) concluded that “students in online learning conditions performed modestly better than those receiving face-to-face instruction” (p. 112). This study has since received criticism in the past because its broad conclusion is somewhat misleading (Figlio, Rush, & Yin, 2013; Jaggars & Bailey, 2010). In fact, the superior online outcomes are driven by hybrid learning conditions in which students receive a mix of online and face-to-face instruction, and no significant differences were found between students in purely online and face-to-face conditions. Furthermore, many of the studies that compare fully-online to face-to-face instruction evaluate short training sessions as opposed to full-semester, college-level courses. Some studies that do focus on fully online, full-semester, college-level courses do find that students in the online format perform better in terms of final grades and test scores. Much of the evidence, however, suggests that students’ outcomes are worse in the online format. Withdrawal and dropout rates are typically higher in online courses relative to their face-to-face counterparts (Xu & Jaggars, 2011, 2013).

Xu and Jaggars (2011) employed propensity score matching to estimate the effect of online instruction on completion rates and grades in two introductory community-college courses. They controlled for a rich set of student and school-level covariates and found that students in online sections are 11-15 percentage points more likely to drop out of the course and, conditional on completing the course, 7-10 percentage points less likely to earn a C or better. Propensity score matching generates causal estimates if the selection process into online courses depends only on the observable covariates. Unobservable covariates, however, such as work and family responsibilities, motivation, or ability, may be correlated with both enrollment in online courses and the course outcome and may bias the estimates. Xu and Jaggars (2013) built upon

this research by implementing an instrumental variables strategy, using travel distance to the student's institution as an instrument for enrollment in the online section of a course, to account for bias stemming from unobservable student characteristics. They continue to find that online instruction has a negative effect on course completion and grades and student-level characteristics, course fixed effects, student fixed effects, and instrumental variables (using the share of seats in a course offered online as the instrument), to estimate the effect of online instruction on course-level success (defined as passing the class as opposed to failing or withdrawing).

### **Remediation Classes**

Remedial education (also developmental education or college remediation) describes precollege-level courses and support services provided by postsecondary institutions to help academically underprepared students succeed in college-level courses (The Institute for Higher Education Policy, (2012). This report narrows this broad definition, referring to remedial education specifically as courses that are offered by postsecondary institutions but that cover curricular content below the college level. Most remedial courses are designed to address entering postsecondary students' low-level skills in English/reading and math (Kurlaender & Howell, 2012). Remedial English/reading courses focus on advancing students' literacy (reading and writing) skills, whereas remedial math courses are typically designed to prepare students for first-level college math courses (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011).

The concept of college remediation is simple: students who arrive on campus unready for college-level work are provided with assistance to bring them up to an adequate level of academic proficiency. In practice, however, remedial education is complicated: the system is characterized by high costs with largely unknown benefits, lack of consensus about the definition

of college readiness, and varying policies and implementing strategies across states and institutions (Kurlaender & Howell, 2012). Because remedial courses cover precollege materials, the credits that students earn in these courses are usually not counted toward graduation requirements. Consequently, remedial students often need more time than nonremedial students to earn a credential (Carey, Lewis & Farris, 1996).

The National Center for Education Statistics (2017d) reported that remediation was more common among several demographic groups typically associated with having weak academic preparation. At public 2-year institutions, 78% of Black students and 75% of Hispanic students (vs. 64% of White students) and 76% of students who were in the lowest income group (vs. 59% of those in the highest) took remedial courses. Similar differences were also found at public 4-year institutions: 66% of Black students and 53% of Hispanic students, compared with 36% of White students, took remedial courses; 52% of students in the lowest income group took remedial courses, while 33% of those in the highest income group did so.

### **Demographics and Remediation**

Because remedial courses are designed to strengthen limited academic skills, remediation is highly concentrated among students with weak academic preparation. At public 2-year institutions, 75% of beginning students with weak academic preparation took remedial courses, compared with 48% of those with strong academic preparation (NCES, 2017d). Remediation was also more prevalent among first-generation students and among older students at public 2-year institutions (54% for students whose parents had no more than a high school education vs. 31% for students whose parents earned a bachelor's or higher degree; 66% for students age 24 or older vs. 39 and 37% for those age 19 and age 18 or younger, respectively), but the differences by level of parental education were not detected and the difference by age was reversed at public

2-year institutions. Furthermore, proportionally more females than males at public 2-year institutions took remedial courses (71% vs. 65%), but the sex difference was not detected at public 4-year institutions (NCES, 2017d).

Regardless of these subgroup differences, college remedial course taking is a widespread phenomenon, involving both disadvantaged and advantaged populations. For example, among students who began at public 2-year institutions and came from high-income or college-educated families, a majority participated in remedial education (59% and 65%, respectively). The majority of remedial course takers—72% of those beginning at public 2-year institutions and 67% of those beginning at public 4-year institutions—enrolled in remedial courses during the first term of college attendance, defined as the first 3 months after entering college (NCES, 2017d).

Many older students who enrolled in remedial courses did not complete them. At public 2-year institutions, approximately half of remedial course takers (49%) completed all the remedial courses that they attempted (i.e., earned a passing grade or some credits) and those who did not complete them were less successful in remedial math courses than in remedial English/reading courses. For example, at public 2-year institutions, 63% of students who attempted remedial English/reading courses completed all these courses, while 50% of students who attempted remedial math courses completed all these courses. No difference, however, was detected among students who began at public 4-year institutions (NCES, 2017d).

Remedial students' low likelihood of persisting in college has been noted by several researchers (e.g., Kurlaender & Howell, 2012), although attending college without earning a certificate or degree may be enough for some occupations. Some have argued that placement into remediation may lower students' self-esteem, reduce their educational expectations, and increase

their frustrations, all of which may discourage them from persisting in college (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002; Rosenbaum, 2001).

### **Student Parents**

Gault et al. (2014) stated that nearly a third of all undergraduate women are mothers, and the majority of those are single mothers—roughly 2 million women or 60% of all student mothers—are also single mothers. Single mothers in college must balance the multiple responsibilities of school, parenthood, and often also employment, without the support of a spouse or partner. Mothers in the Great Lakes and Southeast regions are the most likely to be raising children on their own—64% and 62% of mothers in college in those regions, respectively, are single. In contrast, the Rocky Mountains states have the smallest share of student mothers that are single; however, they still make up half of all college-going mothers in that region. Black women are disproportionately likely to be mothers while in college: nearly half of all Black women undergraduate students are raising dependent children, compared with 29% of White women and one-quarter of Black men (though Black men are the most likely group of male students to be fathers (IWPR, 2016). Approximately two-in-five American Indian or Alaska Native women and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander women are raising dependent children while in college - 41% and 39%, respectively.

The U.S. Department of Education (2017) stated that student parents, especially those who are single, have low rates of college completion when compared with non-parenting students. Only 27% of single student parents attain a degree or certificate within 6 years of enrollment, compared with 56% of dependent students. Attaining a college degree or certificate in a high-demand occupation is critical to finding quality employment with family-sustaining



wages. This is especially true for student parents who need to support their family and pay off their often-significant student debt (Gault et al., 2014).

Student parents are more likely than other students to face intense economic challenges, in large part due to the significant costs of raising young children (Duke-Benfield, 2015; Green, 2013). Student parents work full-time and enroll in school part-time more often than their nonparent counterparts, intensifying their need for reliable—and often costly—childcare (Huelsman & Engle, 2013). They are also more likely than other college students to live below the poverty level, to have an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) to education of \$0, and to have high levels of unmet financial need (IWPR, 2016). Student parents are nearly 50% more likely than independent nonparents to have an EFC of \$0: 61% compared with 41%, respectively. The disparity in EFC can be seen across the United States; in every region of the country, more than half of undergraduate students with dependent children have no money to contribute to college. The Southeast region stands out with nearly two-thirds (65%) of parents with a \$0 EFC. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015)

### **Time Management**

The IWPR (2016) reported that older students have compounding financial challenges and that students with children grapple with significant demands on their time. In addition to time spent in class and studying, most student parents juggle paid work and substantial time caring for children. With these pressures, college affordability for students with children becomes an issue of time as well as money, and support strategies must consider how to help student parents devote the time for academics that it takes to succeed in school.

Student parents often work while in school to make ends meet. Coupled with time needed to meet family obligations, the demands of working while in college can further limit the time

student parents have to focus on course work, spend time with their children, sleep, or have time to themselves (Gault et al., 2014). Student parents are more likely to work while in college than dependent students (66% compared with 58%, respectively) and more likely to work long hours: 66% of student parents worked more than 20 hours per week in 2014-15, compared with 39% of their dependent counterparts (IWPR, 2016). Higher rates of employment and higher numbers of hours worked can endanger student parents' ability to complete school on time or at all (Kuh et al., 2007; Orozco & Cauthen, 2009). When holding a job leads student parents to enroll less than full-time, it can also threaten their eligibility for financial aid that is tied to school credit hours (Huelsman & Engle, 2013). Student parents and independent nonparents, however, remained more than twice as likely as dependent students to work 30 or more hours per week (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

### **Financial Considerations**

Community colleges have long been an important stepping stone for Americans interested in continuing education. The most recent figures from the National Center for Education Statistics (2018) indicated that there are approximately 8.7 million students in the United States studying at public two-year colleges, or community colleges. Over the past several decades, the cost of earning a college diploma has increased dramatically, and community colleges are not immune. According to the College Board's 2018 Trends in College Pricing Report, sticker prices at public two-year institutions are more than twice as high in 2019 as they were in 1989. During the 2018-2019 school year, the reported tuition at public two-year schools is an average \$3,660.

Between 2009 and 2019, the average published tuition and fees at public two-year colleges increased by \$930 (about 34% after adjusting for inflation) but the average combined

grant aid and tax benefits also increased by over \$1,300 (almost 50%) during that period. In fact, according to the College Board, “56% of independent students and 50% of dependent students at public two-year colleges did not pay any part of their tuition and fees” (p. 2). Overall, more than half of community college students received enough grant aid to cover their tuition and fee (NECS, 2018). Nontraditional students who attend community colleges benefit tremendously with cost and the option of transferring to a traditional four-year college with less debt.

## **Grants**

The Association of Community College Trustees (2016) stated that each year the Pell Grant program enables more than three million community college students with financial need to pay for tuition, books, transportation, and living expenses. The Pell Grant remains a valuable investment in a better-educated workforce, higher wages, and a stronger economy. Community colleges are leading the way to allow millions of students and workers to gain the valuable education and workforce training they need to meet the demands of the 21st Century. Continued funding for the Pell Grant program is a vital component to our nation’s long-term economic strength and global competitiveness

Non-traditional students are more likely to receive Pell Grants than traditional students, according to 2015-16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study data. Approximately 40% of students age 24 to 29 and 32% of students 30 and over receive Pell Grant aid (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Dependent women with children are eligible to receive \$6500 per year in Pell grants. Low income is the qualifier for these students the average annual income for Pell grants was less than \$20,000 with children (NCES, 2017c). Most of these women could not attend community colleges without Federal government assistance.

There are other grants available for nontraditional women interested in pursuing careers in teaching, nursing and engineering. Black women over the age of 50 who are in extreme economic need may qualify for the Jeanette Rankin Foundation Grant, which provides awards for non-traditional students pursuing a two- or four-year degree. The Women's Independence Scholarship program offers grants to domestic abuse survivors with no age qualifications. The Business and Professional Women's Association targets its grants toward non-traditional college age women in great economic need (Burney, 2017).

### **Support Systems**

Today's community and technical colleges are facing unprecedented challenges. Across the country they are confronted with this conundrum: Serve more students who are increasingly arriving underprepared for college work with decreasing financial support. Nationally, less than 50% of entering students return to the same institution for their second year (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015).

Despite the fact that students have systematically ranked academic advising as the most important service community colleges can offer their students, more than half of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) (2016) respondents did not talk with an advisor about their educational goals during their first month on campus and about one-third did not participate in orientation. According to findings from the second annual report from CCSSE only 54% of new community college students took an orientation course either on campus or online during their first semester.

Poor academic advising is a common complaint (Karp, O'Gara, & Hughes, 2008). The absence of early academic advising has been implicated as a cause of students dropping out after the first year. The most startling finding by Ashburn (2007) was that more than one-third of the

students said they had not taken any course placement assessment tests after a month in college despite institutional mandates adopted by most community colleges (as cited by Bates, 2012). Ashburn also indicated that although some students are exempt from taking the tests due to their SAT or ACT scores, their numbers fall far below the proportion of students who reported not taking the tests. On the other hand, the findings also showed that academically underprepared students were the most academically integrated and made extensive use of the available resources.

Engstrom and Tinto (2008) conducted a systematic longitudinal 4- year study of the impact of learning communities and their collaborative learning strategies on the college success of academically underprepared, primarily low-income students. This project included thirteen two-year and six four-year colleges in 11 states: California, New York, New Jersey, Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington. The evaluation data were drawn from 2,615 learning community students and 3,114 students in comparison classrooms. The learning community students were far more engaged academically and socially, within and outside of the classroom, than their counterparts in conventional classes (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). The greater degree of engagement translated into higher rates of persistence. Specifically, the community college students, in learning communities, were almost 10% more likely to persist and the four-year college students were slightly more than 5% likely to persevere toward their degree. On some campuses, the difference between the learning community students and the comparison group reached 15%. The themes that surfaced in interviews included having a safe and supportive learning environment, peer support and collaboration, feeling a sense of belonging, and learning through reflection and critical thinking.

The students commented that their experience enhanced their commitment to fulfilling their educational goals. They observed that few studies of persistence and attrition, among students in developmental education, are aligned with the theories of Tinto or Astin.

Research such as the work of Engstrom and Tinto (2008) has documented the success of learning communities. Community college learning communities, which consist of small cohorts of students who are enrolled together in two or more linked courses in a single semester, are a widely-used strategy aimed at improving student outcomes. Unlike instructors of “stand-alone” courses, learning community instructors are expected to communicate with each other to align their syllabi, write integrated curricula, and prepare common assignments. Instructors use pedagogical practices to encourage active and collaborative learning, taking advantage of the stronger relationships among students in the class that occur through the cohort experience. Learning communities also often include enhanced supports, such as tutoring and extra advising. (Visher, Weiss, Weissman, Rudd, & Wathington, 2015)

The Visher et al. (2015) theory of change for learning communities predicts that participating students will not only form stronger relationships with each other and with their instructors, but that they will also engage more deeply with the content of the courses when they see a context for what they are learning. They will therefore be more likely to pass their courses, persist from semester to semester, and graduate with a credential. Consistent with the theory of change, prior research on learning communities provides some evidence that participation in a learning community is related to students reporting increased levels of engagement, more meaningful relationships with other students, and improved higher-order thinking skills. Studies by Engstrom and Tinto (2008) also suggest that learning communities may have modest positive associations with outcomes such as course completion and persistence in college. While these

findings are encouraging, the design of these studies leaves open the question of whether the effects were due to the program itself or to pre-program differences in the characteristics of those students who chose to enroll in the program.

Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation's (MDRC) (2015) Opening Doors Demonstration and the Learning Communities Demonstration used a random assignment research design to test this strategy as implemented in six community colleges around the country. Random assignment ensures that students in both the program and the control groups are similar in terms of observable characteristics, such as age, gender, and race, as well as harder-to-observe characteristics, such as academic experiences before college and personal motivation. By following both groups and comparing their outcomes, the evaluation provides strong evidence of the "value added," or *impact*, of learning communities on student achievement. As part of MDRC's multisite Opening Doors Demonstration, Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, New York, tested a one-semester learning community program. The program placed freshmen, most of whom needed developmental English and/or developmental math courses, into groups of up to 25 students who took three classes together during their first semester: an English course, an academic course required for the students' major, and a freshman orientation course. It also provided counseling, tutoring, and textbook vouchers. From Fall 2013 to Spring 2015, over 1,500 students were randomly assigned to either the program group, where they had the opportunity to participate in the program and enroll in a learning community, or the control group, where they were offered the college's usual services but could not enroll in the learning communities program. The Kingsborough study found that the program improved students' college experiences and some short-term educational outcomes, including credit attainment and progress through developmental English requirements.

In part as a result of the early Kingsborough findings, the National Center for Postsecondary Research, of which MDRC is a partner, launched the Learning Communities Demonstration at six colleges. Five of these institutions the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) in Maryland, Hillsborough Community College in Florida, Houston Community College in Texas, Merced College in California, and Queensborough Community College in New York operated learning communities for students in need of developmental courses in English or math. The targeted developmental course was linked with a “student success course,” another developmental course, or a college-level course. The sixth program evaluated as part of the Learning Communities Demonstration consisted of career-focused learning communities at Kingsborough; these learning communities did not include developmental courses. As in Opening Doors, random assignment was used to estimate impacts for each program. From 2013 to 2015, approximately 1,000 students were randomly assigned at each college, about half of whom had the opportunity to enroll in a learning community.

The results from the five Learning Communities Demonstration programs targeted to students in developmental education, as well as the subsample of the Kingsborough Opening Doors students referred to developmental English, were pooled to understand the effects of learning communities for students in developmental education. Analysis of data from three semesters at each college (one program semester and two follow-up semesters) revealed that learning communities for developmental education students, on average, produced a small impact on credits earned in the targeted subject (English or mathematics), no discernible impact on credits outside that subject, and a small effect on total credits earned. No effects were seen on semester-to-semester persistence. The Kingsborough Opening Doors program showed somewhat



larger effects than the other sites on credits earned in the targeted subject in the three semesters of follow up (Sommo, Mayer, Rudd, & Cullinan, 2016).

### **Conclusion**

The growth in the proportion and numbers of community college students who are parents has important implications for state and national postsecondary attainment goals. Community colleges will need to ensure that students with children succeed in college, and understand the demographics of their student parent populations, their degree of financial need, and the supports needed to promote their success. Federal and state policymakers and institutional and program leaders must work to establish policies to promote postsecondary attainment among student parents. Preserving and strengthening campus child improve student parents' access to quality, affordable childcare (Boressoff, 2013; Schumacher, 2015).

Secondly, making community colleges more affordable is welcoming for nontraditional student parents through family-friendly events and spaces that can engage student parents in campus life, and help them establish peer support networks (Schumacher, 2015). Student parents' complicated schedules and time demands, make it essential to ensure that part-time and working students have access. Nontraditional female students can achieve long-term economic and social gains from increased college completion. Community colleges must invest in and improve access to financial aid, and other supportive services which will improve retention and completion outcomes among nontraditional students.

Learning communities may be an effective instrument to retain non-rational students, however the cost according to the lasted data is \$570 per student each semester (SENSE, 2016). Community colleges may decide that the gain of half a credit is worth the additional costs, particularly if the program also leads to other benefits for students, and instructors.

## **CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter I will present the research design and rationale, site, participants, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness for this study. The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences that nontraditional African-American females have at their community college.

### **Design and Rational**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used for gaining insights into the phenomenology of the experiences of nontraditional African-American females attending community college. IPA is designed to describe how people make sense of their major life experiences. A researcher using IPA is concerned with participants exploring an experience on their own terms. IPA research follows the participant's lead in this regard, rather than attempting to "fix" an experience in predefined or overly abstract categories (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

The Arnold Anderson Community College (AACC), which is a pseudonym for the community college in this study, served as the study location. AACC is in the eastern United States. AACC serves a diverse population of more than 44,000 students from 103 countries. The college offers more than 200 academic, workforce development, and continuing education programs of study; AACC also offers transfer and scholarship opportunities to four-year colleges and universities. Students can earn associate degrees, certificates, and/or licensure. AACC was selected due to the locality of the campus to my residence, programs offered and the diversity at the community college. African-American women are often the only guardians for younger members of their family, which often determines the economic cost as well as the geographic

location of their ideal institutions (Niu, 2015). Therefore, AACC is in close proximity and this allowed women to stay closer to home during the first two years of their education.

### **Research Participants**

The participants for this study were single, nontraditional age, African-American females, with one or more children under the age of 17. The participants for this study were 25 years old and older. Based on the research literature on nontraditional students, 25 years and over is one of the defining characteristics for this population (NCES, 2015). Age acts as a surrogate variable that captures a large, heterogeneous population of adult students who often have family and work responsibilities as well as other life circumstances that can interfere with successful completion of educational objectives (NCES, 2015). Other variables typically used to characterize nontraditional students are associated with their background (race and gender); place of residence (i.e., not on campus); level of employment, especially working full-time or part-time; and being enrolled in non-degree and degree occupational programs (NCES, 2015).

### **Participant Selection Process**

I contacted AACC and requested permission to meet with the AACC President and the Director of the Student Support Services to discuss my research. I requested a letter of cooperation from (AACC). I also requested that the Director of Student Services assist with the study. The letter was not included in the appendix of my dissertation due to confidentiality. I asked that the Director of Student Support Services assign a gatekeeper who would assist me with distributing to students a brief paragraph explaining the study and disseminating flyers (see Appendix A) containing my email address. I requested permission to hang flyers and posters related to my study on the student education bulletin boards around the campus. Lastly, once the initial participants were identified, I utilized the snowball sampling process by asking the

participants if they knew others who were in similar circumstances at the community college who might participate in my study.

Participants who were interested in the study contacted me via email, telephone or online. This part of the process allowed me to screen potential participants and determine if they met all the criteria. From the prescreening, I developed a list of 15 to 25 potential participants. Twelve (12) participants who met the criteria were provided the participant *consent* form to be signed (see Appendix B). I explained that their information would be kept confidential. Two decided to not participate. If they agreed to participate, they were given the option to sign, scan, and email the consent form or meet me in person at their convenience to return the form. After the consent forms were returned, I interviewed participants based on their availability. Ten participants were emailed and interviewed at a mutually convenient location, in a secure meeting room at the community college.

### **Data Collection**

According to Smith et al. (2009), a qualitative interview is often described as “a conversation with a purpose” (p. 57). After the participants were selected to participate in the study, they were interviewed according to this process. Interviews were held in a public place at AACC on campus in a secure meeting room and each interview lasted 45-90 minutes. Interviews were conducted in person. There were three interviews for each participant. In the first interview, I attempted to establish trust and build rapport. At the beginning of the interview I explained in depth the purpose and nature of the study and the interview schedule. The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder. See Appendix C for the list of guiding questions used in the first interview.

In the second interview the semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix D) were used as a guide which focused on understanding the participants' experiences at their community college. These interviews lasted approximately one hour and 30 minutes. Data were collected with a handheld audio recorder and I had a backup recorder.

During the third interview I placed emphasis on the retelling of the stories. The purpose of the third interview was to allow the participant to further explore memories and experiences at their local community college. These interviews lasted about 45-90 minutes with the emphasis on describing the participant's experiences. There were no structured questions for this interview. After the third interview, I provided each participant with a \$20 Starbucks gift card as a token of my appreciation for their participation in the study.

I maintained a computer folder on each participant for the audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These folders were stored with an encrypted password protected file on my hard drive. Later I printed the folders and stored them in a locked cabinet to ensure participant privacy. The emerging themes and essential data were summarized and processed from the interviews with each participant. I shared with the participants my analysis of the interviews and any recurring themes. By sharing my analysis, participants had an opportunity to react to recurring themes. I maintained a semantic notebook of the interview. Key data from the interview were summarized and processed immediately following discussions with each participant. The results of member checking were added to the participants' folders.

### **Data Analysis**

IPA can be characterized by a set of common processes (e.g., moving from the particular to the shared, and from the descriptive to the interpretative) and principles (e.g., a commitment to an understanding of the participant's point of view, and applying a psychological focus to

understanding the participants point of view), which are applied flexibly, according to the analytic task (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79). In this study, the purpose was to identify themes and emerging patterns from data in the transcripts.

The first step of an IPA analysis involves immersing oneself in the original data (Smith et al., 2009). This was in the form of the transcribed interviews. This stage of the process involved reading and re-reading the data. I worked through the data, initially, one transcript/participant at a time. Second, through my initial note taking I examined the semantic content and language use on a very exploratory level. I maintained an open mind in reviewing the transcript. It provided detailed descriptions that describe not only what was spoken by the participant, but the setting, background, and nonverbal language as well. The intent of this study was to provide detailed description by not only transcribing the words of the participants, but by also examining the nonverbal participant behaviors. All participants were interviewed in person, face to face. I observed their body language and eye contact while they were being interviewed.

Thirdly, I looked for emergent data (the transcript and initial notes) while maintaining complexity in terms of mapping the interrelationships, connections, and patterns. I then moved to the next participant transcript and repeated the process. I treated each case on its own terms to do justice to its individuality. I used bracketing from the analysis of the first participant interview while working on the second participant interview. Lastly, I looked for patterns across cases. This included using the chart that was redeveloped on a large surface and looking across them. The purpose of the reflexivity was to attempt to bracket out researcher assumptions and biases, to identify the data in its purest form (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Further, to ensure remaining as unbiased as possible during the data collection and analysis, a reflexivity journal was utilized throughout the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A second audit journal was kept,

simply to provide an area to make notes, write questions, track thoughts or concerns. This second journal has been made available as part of the audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I prepared an Excel spreadsheet that captured the most important things to say about all the participants. From this process, I noticed a pattern where the words “family,” “faith,” and “stress” were repeated by all the participants. From this analysis, each participant’s transcript generated themes. The thematic analyses were maintained in an Excel document for all participants. Additionally, unusual themes were also examined. Finally, the themes “that address a larger theoretical perspective in the research” were examined (Creswell, 2009, p. 187). This was done by combining each participant’s Excel file data into a master Excel file. From this compilation, the themes were established by the phenomenon.

### **Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed several validity strategies to assess credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability that are established measures of trustworthiness in a qualitative research study. All four validity strategies were essential to ensure the truthfulness of this study.

### **Credibility**

Credibility helped to establish the truth of the study because it ensured that the researcher’s bracketing was restrained and that the participants were given the opportunity to evaluate the researcher’s interpretations. In this study, I employed member-checking to allow the participants to review the transcriptions and my interpretations. The participants reviewed their transcripts from the second interview, and then again after the third interview. Additionally, the participants were given access to the final write-up of the study. Second, I utilized a peer-to-peer evaluation to assist with the overall credibility. The peer reviewer was a colleague who helped

me identify missed themes, researcher bias, and general errors that I might not identify in the transcriptions and final write-ups. Their assessment was open and honest, and I agreed with their recommendations.

### **Transferability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the only way to demonstrate transferability to other settings is to provide detailed descriptions that describe not only what was spoken by the participant, but the setting, background, and nonverbal language as well. The intent of this study was to provide detailed description by not only transcribing the words of the participant, but by also examining the nonverbal participant behaviors. All participants were interviewed in person, face to face. I observed their body language and eye contact while they were being interviewed and noted this in the findings when it was pertinent.

### **Dependability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that to show dependability of the study, the researcher should develop an inquiry-audit. The inquiry audit should be conducted at the end of the study, during the final write-up, and allow for a researcher not involved in the study to examine all aspects of the research. The peer reviewer has a Ph.D. in Education, and has written many articles in various journals on educational leadership and learning technology at community colleges, determined that the findings, interpretations, and conclusions were supported by the data.

### **Confirmability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the most essential elements of a study are the participants and confirmability. Confirmability ensures that the participants' stories are told with as little researcher predisposition as possible. To control predisposition and reaffirm



confirmability, I provided personal reflexivity. “Reflexivity is the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research stages” (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, para. 1). Next, I maintained an electronic password encrypted journal throughout all stages of the study. I kept notes in the journal on the time and date for each interview the location, and whether the interview was face-to-face. Also, I established an audit trail that described the process in the progress of the research proposal, data collection and data analysis, and final write-ups.

### **Perspective**

The purpose of this research was to provide data with current indicators, themes and challenges a nontraditional African-American female may encounter and experience at the community college. This study captured the lived experiences of nontraditional African-American women who have completed 12 credit hours at a community college and who have been or are enrolled for at least one year. I utilized the IPA qualitative method for my research. I interviewed participants. Lastly, I used Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) validity strategies to assess credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability as measures of trustworthiness.

### **Summary**

This chapter described the study as an interpretive phenomenological qualitative research design, methodology, sample selection, instrumentation, data collection, and the data analysis procedures. It discussed the demographic group and how the participants were engaged, identified, qualified and processed into the study. The target group was nontraditional African American women who were enrolled in a community college. The research method was face-to-face allowed the expression of personal descriptors in the participants’ own voices and enabled them to tell their phenomenon about the

determination it took to continue the journey to graduate earning an AA or AAS degree.

The next chapter will describe the findings from those interviewed.

## **CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

Chapter 4 describes the findings from the analysis of the participants' interviews which were used to identify the common themes from the participants' lived experiences at their local community college. The first part of the chapter introduces the 10 study participants, including a brief biography of each participant. The second part of the chapter presents 11 of the implied categories from the participants' interviews. The third part is the conclusion of the interviews.

### **The Participants**

This study consisted of 10 nontraditional African-American women who attended a community college located in the eastern part of the United States. In the following paragraphs, the participants' biographies are presented by using the months of the calendar year as pseudonyms.

#### **January**

January is a 64-year-old female who has attended (AACC) for six years. She has four adult children and four grandchildren; she also takes care of a developmentally disabled sister. January works fulltime on the third-shift and attends classes in the afternoon. She is the first member of her family to attend college. She is enrolled in two classes, and she prefers online courses. January pays for her college expenses; she is not eligible to receive federal assistance because she is over the age of 60. She has taken remedial courses in math and English that required the use of tutors. She is in the nursing degree program.

#### **February**

February is a 25-year-old female. She is a native of the East Coast, she has a brother and sister, she is single, and she lives at home with her parents. She is the first in her family to attend

college. February has been enrolled at AACC for three years, she is studying social work, and she works part-time at the college. She is interested in becoming a social worker. Two of her favorite classes are sociology and humanities.

### **March**

March is a 52-year-old female from the East Coast. She is single and has no children. She works fulltime as a business secretary. She is the first in her family to attend college; she started at AACC 20 years ago. March did not qualify for the Pell grant, so she has student loans. Her area of study is in business administration and she prefers in-class instruction.

### **April**

April is a 52-year-old female who is from the East Coast. She is an Army veteran and served in Desert Storm in 1991. April is not married; she has one daughter and two grandchildren. She works part-time at (AACC) with the Veteran's Administration. Her mother was educated at a historically Black college. April prefers face-to-face classroom interaction with her professors. She is majoring in health and science and plans on enrolling in a four-year institution to pursue her bachelor's degree.

### **May**

May is a 36-year-old female from the East Coast. She works part-time at AACC and works retail on the weekends. She has a bachelor's degree. She is enrolled in the Registered Nursing Program, which will be her second degree at AACC; her first degree was in General Studies. She is single, lives at home with her parents, and has no children. May comes from a college educated family; both of her parents attended college.

**June**

June is a 57-year-old female from the East Coast. She is married and has no children. June works fulltime and comes from a college educated family, her mother has a bachelor's degree and her father has an associate degree. She is studying human services.

**July**

July is a 54-year-old female; she is from the northeastern part of the United States. She works fulltime and has attended AACC part-time for a year. July has two children and two grandchildren. She is from a college-educated family; her mother and sister have bachelor's degrees. She is studying criminal justice.

**August**

August is a 37-year-old female from the northeastern United States. She works fulltime at AACC and has attended college fulltime for five years. August is single with four children; she is from a college-educated family. She is studying human services/special affairs.

**September**

September is a 47-year-old female from the northeastern United States. She works fulltime and attends college part-time. September has two children and comes from a college-educated family. Both September's parents have college degrees. She is studying early childhood education.

**October**

October is a 42-year-old female from the northeastern United States. She is self-employed and attends school fulltime. She has been attending AACC for six years. October is married with two children; she does not come from a college-educated family. She is studying human services.

### **Categories Inferred from the Data**

The following categories emerged from the participants at the community college. The categories were identified during the interview coding process. The categories are explained in detail here.

#### **Participants' Support**

For some participants, obtaining a college degree was not their only challenge. They also worked and raised families (including grandchildren) on limited financial resources. The economic downturn in 2008 required women to have certain technology skills and education to compete for a living wage job. Many of the available jobs offered were barely above the minimum wage. All the participants had children/grandchildren to provide for. For January, April, and July the challenge was working full-time, attending college, and raising grandchildren. As women over the age of 50, January, April, and July were nontraditional students and grandmothers providing for their grandchildren.

January has been attending AACC since 2010. Moreover, January supports two grandchildren and provides for a sister who is developmentally disabled, in addition to holding a third shift job. April is a military veteran supporting her grandchildren while maintaining a 3.7 GPA. April works fulltime on campus to support her family. July works spilt shifts, meaning she takes classes between shifts; after work she goes home and provides for her grandchildren.

Six of the participants came from a family where at least one parent or sibling had attended college and completed their degree. April's parents both have bachelor's degrees. During April's interview I noted she did not make much eye contact with me she seemed strong but awkwardly shy:

My mother was a schoolteacher and she completed college. It was an important thing, for them to go to college and do something other than what their mothers and grandmothers did, which was mostly domestic and labor type jobs.

My mother always instilled education, but I had a hard head and I chose the military, I could have done this a long time ago, but I chose to do this after the military ... my mom is very supportive.

For September, college provides the only opportunity to achieve a level economic playing field.

Her parents, both of whom have bachelor's degrees, are supportive of her pursuing a college education. September stated:

Well, no one in my family has ever graduated from college, nor have they ever had the opportunity to attend college, nor has anybody talked to them about college growing up. My dad always had a desire to go to school, however his father didn't go to school or go to college, so his father didn't know how to send him off to college.

Some of the participants' families were more concerned with the participants finding a job. August did not receive support from her family. During her interview her tone was angry and she was visibly clenching her fist:

My mother was not supportive. She felt as though I needed to go to a job-training program so I could get hands on experience and get a job that way. She suggested Phoenix Academy or Sawyer. I went online and they weren't state accredited, and they have several complaints against them, and I just got offered a scholarship at AACC.

February had an experience similar to August: "I live at home with my mom and three of my siblings that's younger than me. My mom thinks I should be working full-time instead of being in school." June also reported that financial constraints affected her family's support. She noted: "Now my mother [was] from that generation...just...go through high school, you know the finances were not there."

### **Family Support**

Originally, the participants were asked about those around them that supported them while they took their courses. Family support was important for most of the participants. This

support included assistance with assignments and encouragement. April came from a college educated family and had the support from her mother and children. She stated:

Yes. My mother has taught for 25 years at Howard University, but I had a hard head and I chose the military because I could have done this a long time ago but yeah, she's very supportive. My father has passed but when I was speaking to him about it right before I retired from the military, and he was very supportive.

June exhibited an occasional smile during the interview stating she had the support of her family, which was a key to her success:

My husband is extremely supportive. He's supported me from day one financially and, you know, in the house in terms of running the house...to pay bills and cleaning stuff like that. So, he's kind of taking over some of the duties in the home for me till I get finished with college.

October was very emotional during her interview she stated she had a child out of wedlock when she was 19. She mentioned that her son is ecstatic because:

He grew up with me. He's watched me want this. He's watched me study, he's watched me enroll and talk about it, so he's very excited. My daughter, she's watched me a little bit so she's just now starting to say, "are you graduating soon or is this happening?" Yeah, it's happening. It's going to happen and it's happening. So, I think, I can answer that question with more clarity once I walk across the stage and she sees that, okay, this has happened.

Several of the family members were available to encourage participants when they were feeling overcome. Most of the participants felt that their family support played a significant role in their success. However, two of the participants did not receive family support. These participants, August and May, were chastised by their families and told they were too old to be going to school; they were told they needed to find other avenues to increase their income. August became emotional during the conversation. As noted previously, she indicated that her mother was not supportive.

My mother was not supportive. She felt as though I needed to go to a job training program, so, I could get hands on experience and get a job that way. She suggested Phoenix Academy or Sawyer and I went online, and they weren't state accredited, and they have several complaints against them.



May also expressed a lack of family support:

I don't get that support from my mother and stepfather. In my household we don't talk about our issues that is just the way I grew up. My mother doesn't even tell her coworkers I'm in a nursing program because if I fail...she will be embarrassed. My mother does not have confidence in me.

### **Participants' Faith**

One of the findings revealed in this study was the participants' faith in God. Several of the participants mentioned their spiritual support was essential to them reaching their goals. Without their faith in God, many of the participants stated, they would not make it through each day. September was passionate and emotional (tears) about her faith and believed it was God who led her to AACC:

I love the Lord so a lot of prayer...has been so good and I think God will get me through this. What has enabled me to succeed at the school is my connection with God. If I did not have my faith, then I would have given up on this journey.

June grabbed her cross and softly mentioned that:

It's faith. My faith in God has motivated me to complete my education, because once you get your education you have a chance. Then you educate yourself on how to take care of yourself mentally, physically and spiritually.

October stated:

I had to keep me motivated and inspired but I think that my walk with God...He lives inside of me, and that He was giving me the strength to endure. He is putting me in the faces of people to give me those little nuggets of encouragement

### **Stress and Anxiety while Enrolled in School**

Many of the participants felt considerable stress and anxiety while enrolled in school. Several of the participants were going through career transitions. One reason for stress was handling a job while trying to obtain their college degree. In addition, many of the participants experienced financial hardship covering their college tuition and sometimes they had to quit school and return when they had the finances to afford their tuition. May and August echoed

similar concerns about the stress that they experienced although October's situation was unique from the others. May stated:

I've had multiple jobs in my two years here because a lot of my employers can't deal with the regular schedule of nursing. So, it's hard trying to balance school and work because of nursing. Nursing...a lot of employees don't understand, and they didn't care. At my current position, my boss was very supportive in the beginning of my schedule and then when my final came last week...she did a complete 360.... Now, it's like she's reducing my hours. Now, I'm finding myself looking for another job. So, I've decided the fourth semester, where it's like the roughest semester, I'm not going to work. I might have to take on loans because employers are trying to make me put their job first. (Working in retail) is not my goal.

October mentioned the following stress-related concerns:

Well for me, because it took me--this is a two-year college--it took almost four or five years to get my degree. So, for me it was just a matter of prioritizing, if things were getting too stressed, I stopped.... I can't stop working. I can't stop being mother and I can't stop being a wife, but I can stop being a student. So that's what happened, I stopped school, regrouped, handled my business. Relaxed got my brain back together and got myself back together, took care of myself did some self-care and then re-enrolled and picked it back up again.

Many of the participants had poor interactions with their instructors, which caused them to feel less than or treated unfairly in the classroom. In my interview with January she was extremely frustrated. Her experience with her instructors was daunting:

The communication was bad, when I needed to speak with them in person, they told me you know how to use emails don't you. I felt belittled, they basically told me I guess I have emails. They, "don't respond to people who have outside the concerns and issues. Once "I had a family emergency and asked for and extension to turn in my assignment. One instructor stated it wouldn't be fair to those students that they would give me an extension. If they wanted to or they could have given me extension [an] up to January if they wanted to. But they chose not to. And to tell me that it's not fair to another student then why do you have the extension available for the professors and the students? Other younger students were given extension why not me? I reached out to another professor for help for extended time because I knew, I could complete the classwork. Originally, he said yes, and then took it back.

February became emotional (tears) during her interviews, stated she was made to feel less than other people in the classroom by the instructors.

Yes. I have professors that would like [to] gloat about the students who have like straight A's and B's. The professors singled out the high achiever in the classroom. People that were having challenges, they would single them out in front of everybody.

March's interaction with her instructors was not enjoyable. She felt that:

The professors were just there for the paycheck. Several professors would request that you read the book. 'They would not go over material in class and then give you a test no review of the course material'. She stated, 'several students felt that way. You were basically teaching yourself.'

## **Motivation to Learn**

All the participants interviewed were motivated and had a very positive attitude to succeed at AACC. Several of participants revealed certain triggers in their life that motivated them to return to school and pursue a college degree friends, economic opportunity. Many of the participants felt that an education would lead to a new career, promotion and a sense of accomplishments of completing their college degree. March attributed her motivation to:

I want a better paying job. I was living in an apartment and I just didn't want to live in an apartment. I was wanting my own home. To get my home, I had to make more money. So, that's what made me decide to go back to school, so that I could better myself.

At least two participants expressed similar reasons for returning to school. September's smiled often during the interviews and was very motivated to finish school:

To get, my degree is important because that piece of paper means so much to me. The degree will make ...a difference as far as me helping my family, you know, because the finances does make a difference. And my principal has made it clear for me, in order to make money, an educational background. So, it would mean a lot and...my kids are being supportive and saying, 'yeah, you should go ahead...you can do it, you can do it. But nothing is stopping you.' So, I'm like, okay, let me get it, the degree.

May's motivation to learn, was to change her career from retail to a career in nursing during her interview she mentioned:

I just try to stay humble and just try to say to myself, "I know who I am. I know "I'm educated. I know I can take care of the patient's the same way, you know, somebody who is not black." I saw a couple weeks ago, black women in medicine, who were doctors,

and how they had to prove themselves and still proving themselves. They were an inspiration for me because it feels good to see that I'm not the only one going through this problem. And when...there's only few African - Americans in the Nursing program and each semester, it's less and less, they end up dropping out because of grades. Most seemed like [they] realized that nursing is not for them. So, I'm just trying to stay focused and achieve this career change.

## **Community College Access**

The community college access category included experiences related specifically to registration and course enrollment and financial assistance. Going back to college as a nontraditional student can be daunting if you are not prepared and do not have resources.

**Course enrollment.** The participants discussed the challenge of enrolling in degree related courses. It was common for these participants to have to enroll in developmental courses for years and repeat several classes, particularly math. Nine of the participants stated they were often frustrated with taking remedial/developmental courses for several years, and having to pay for these classes, which did not earn college credits. Many of the participants had to repeat math classes. September stated, "I had to take math and I'm still in the process of taking math. I had to take a break from it. This is my second attempt at taking Math 011; it is not an easy subject for me." February stated, "Let's just say I barely passed with a low C in my last math class." June, who enrolled at AACC in 2003, noted:

Yes, I've been at AACC since 2003, I'm very nontraditional working full-time, I couldn't take any more than two or three classes at a time. I had to take remedial math and English for three years. I had to pay for it out of pocket, and so I've been going for a while and I'm in the process of graduating, so I've been going for what? Thirteen years? It's taken me a while; I'll get my certificate in human services and associate degree and I need 25 more credits before I get my bachelors.

July said:

I just spoke with my adviser and she gave me some advice as to which math to take. I'm not sure of the exact name yet so I still need to register. I haven't registered yet; I am not good at math and I fear that I will not do well in that class.

Only March did not have to enroll in developmental courses at AACC; she started 23 years ago.

**Full-time Enrollment and Part-time Enrollment.** Participants were asked about their full-time and part-time enrollment. Seven participants attended college part-time. In addition, only three participants were able to attend school full-time. Several of the participants could not afford to attend school full-time because of their jobs and other responsibilities, outside of the classroom, such as family obligations and other financial obligations. The following are examples of participants who work and attend school either part-time or full-time: March stated:

I worked full-time, I was required to take two classes that made me eligible for my financial aid, if I did not take two classes then no financial aid. I had to keep my job to keep a roof over my head.

April mentioned she worked part-time and attended college part-time:

I do a lot of part-time work and volunteer work right now because, I want to put most of my focus on school. I'm a retired veteran though so that is my life.

August is studying human services; she works part time at AACC and attends classes full-time. She is raising four children and is motivated to receive her degree and hopefully get a full-time job in her major. She is on welfare and wants a better life for her family. Additionally, May mentioned, that she works part-time and lives at home because of the demands of her degree:

My classes are pretty much Monday through to Friday nine to four so it's pretty much like a fulltime job. I would say about 30 hours, 30, 30 hours minimum. So, I work part-time, I work a few hours a week, so I live at home with my parents. Because I can't afford to live on my own and I work a lot with my nursing program. May is hoping to get her own place once she graduates.

October mentioned that she was able to attend school full-time and work full-time because she was determined to complete her associate degree in a reasonable time frame. Her next objective is to enroll in a four-year school and receive her bachelor's degree in human services.

**Financial Assistance.** Several of the participants in this study worked part-time and faced the financial obligations that many women encounter. Some of their obligations included:

paying for their tuition out of pocket, taking out student loans, and raising children and grandchildren. Additionally, two of the participants were living on welfare, and working part-time while pursuing their college degree. This was a significant topic of conversation during the interviews as for many of the participants the financial obligations were both personally and educationally challenging. Eight participants received financial aid while the other two paid “out of pocket.” January received a county waiver because she was over 60 and did not qualify for a scholarship or financial aid. She stated:

At AACC they have a waiver from the county for people over 60, you don’t pay for your credit hours ... So, anything has left over after your fees, then they put you on a payment program. It could be \$80 every month until it’s paid off.

July expressed her thoughts on tuition assistance.

Maybe we could just pay a fraction of something. But I think our tuition should be covered and the books should be covered. I really do especially for those who are struggling. Education should be free ... again, I hate to keep reiterating and go back to the fact of finances. About finances because it is such a struggle to try to stay in team your schoolwork, your curriculum, and then try to worry about “I have to pay for this.” “Will I be able to pay for; will I be able to pay register?” “Will it penalize me for this?” That add the stress on you, and you know, even with the hybrid math course, we weren’t made aware of the \$140 access code that we had to pay for until after we start the class.

### **Coursework: Classroom vs Online**

The mature nontraditional participants seemed to prefer online coursework vs. classroom interactions. The reason provided was because they felt uncomfortable in front of the younger students. Some of the participants stated they felt the instructors were trying to embarrass them or make them feel less than. March mentioned:

I took courses in the classroom the first few years but the last couple years. I did online classes. I prefer to do that because I could manage my time at home and still do stuff around the house, so, I prefer the online classes. My very last class was the only class that I did inside the classroom because [it] was Economics, but for the most part I did online classes. The challenging courses, I stayed in class but other stuff I did it on my own at home.

The participants were asked if they were successful in their online courses. August commented:

Yes, I had been every online class I've taken, I've got an A. I just don't prefer the online class. I like the face-to-face interaction. I like the fact that being able to ask questions if I'm not sure where I need to go with this assignment or what the context is.

The two participants who chose to take classes online stated their primary reason was to avoid group interaction. These two participants preferred to work independently, instead of working directly with classmates. September stated, about her online classes. "I've done well on, the written classes I've taken so far. I have two Bs and one A. I was working alone and at my pace and time."

For all the participants, coursework was a mixture of projects, written papers, and exams. Eight of the participants interacted during their courses with group members working on various oral and written presentations. Two participants had taken most of their courses online with limited group work. The following discusses the participants' experiences with each type of course work.

Assignments entailed written papers, and PowerPoint presentations. Most of the participants who took classes in the classroom stated their course grade was 80% based upon written assignments. The most commonly reported problems were "getting assignments in on time and having enough time to work with groups outside of class on projects." Several participants thought there should be more consideration of nontraditional students who have more responsibilities than completing assignments. August mentioned:

I think that there should be some more consideration because your non-traditional student or because you are a more mature student with more responsibilities as opposed to the traditional students who has maybe living at home with their parents. I feel like if you have a student that has children and is a single parent and you have the proper paperwork then you know you should be able to make up those assignments. Not a hand down but a hand up.

All participants who were required to write papers admitted that this activity caused more stress than other course activities. The stress was caused because of the limited amount of time most of the participants had to both research and then write the papers. Two of the participants, October and September, said the stress was caused because of worrying about how to write on a college level. October stated,

It was stressful sitting down and having to write a college paper. "That can be stressful. You had to put in hours of writing, in front of you that should be done, and you have a very limited amount of time to complete the assignment.

September indicated:

Just, so that you, know, even if you are just being writing for 20 to 30 minutes just trying to make sure you're on tract. You know I struggled in English, "I tried to make the best of the resources and I go to the writing lab.

The participants stated they spent an average of 10 hours a week doing homework per course on campus. April spent the most, up to 15 hours a week, and June spent the least, as little as three hours a week. Regardless of the time the spent studying, several of the participants seemed to manage their time astutely. In the face to face interview with April she became very emotional about her journey:

Going to school it's a lot of stress but I have good time management, you know, prioritizing because of assignment due dates. If I have something that's due a month out and I have something that's due next week, then I need to know to pay attention to what's due next week. I have learned to improve my time management as I have progressed at AACC.

In the interviews with July, she mentioned how exhausting and frustrated it was to continue her educational goals and work fulltime and this was visually noted in her expression and excitement:

I start my job around quarter after six am I drive a bus for the disabled, then I drive back to my location at about 10am. At 10am I come out of work for a few hours, and then I've come to school. So again, I am trying to work my class around my job because I don't think it will work out otherwise. Then I must be back to work by 1:30 pm and then I'm done about 5:30pm to quarter to six. I do this four day per week.



## **Programs and Services that have Assisted Participants**

Most of the participants believed that Student Achievement and Success programs (SAS) were beneficial to them and their academic activities. The SAS is a support and retention program at AACC designed to increase the academic success, retention, graduation and transfer of students who traditionally may have more barriers and challenges to overcome in order to realize their goals. In addition, these students are traditionally first generation, low income, under prepared, and minority.

Six of the participants felt that the program made the transition at AACC successful. Two participants were not aware of the SAS program and were only made aware of the program after participating in the study. Those who participated in the program felt that SAS helped them stay focused and offered resources to assist them with their educational goals. October indicated that the SAS program has been beneficial to her:

There are several college counselors that assist you with a generic formula to obtain your educational goals. The counselors will get you on the roadmap to succeed in school. Additionally, what I've noticed about SAS is they get involved in your plan for educational success. They are specific to your educational DNA.

April indicated her support of the SAS program:

I love the support that I received from the SAS program. The people in the SAS program ...have helped me on my journey. Talking to them, even some of the counselors here on campus, talking to them, [and] maybe people in my church, speaking to them.

May stated:

The SAS program has worked well for me; I would say I heard about the SAS program through colleagues and classmates, so I reached out to SAS. I applied for a college scholarship and I got nursing scholarship so pretty much I had to with the scholarship financial aid I had to do my own research.

## **Outreach to African-American Women**

Many of the participants felt the AACC was doing its best to assist their educational efforts; however, many felt there should be a Black women's initiative program on campus like the one for Black men. May suggested that AACC implement a nontraditional African-Women's program to assist with the challenge of returning to school. Most of the participants were not aware of many of the programs available to them, (i.e., disability, tutors, and mentors). May stated the following:

We need to target people like mature black women, there are a lot of, older black women that can attend their local community colleges in their county. Maybe (AACC) can go into areas where it's predominantly African-Americans and then offer them...certificate programs or diploma programs to help them have a better life.

April felt that with a Black women's club on campus, students would not have to endure the many challenges, such as age discrimination and classroom biases. May stated she had heard of one or two instances of biases towards older African-American women at AACC:

I know there are barriers. I am durable because they don't have what I have on my tool belt. They haven't been, seen, done and had to go through the things that I had to go through in the military. So, they don't have the tough skin that I have. So, yes that could be a deterrent and a discouraging factor that would probably make them not complete or at least not complete here. I believe a black women's academic social initiative program is needed to deal with these types of issues.

## **Having a Mentor**

In this study, four of the 10 participants had a mentor; the other six participants did not know how to access a mentor. May stated the mentoring program was essential, to her achieving educational goals. May felt her mentor "assisted me with leadership and developmental courses that would support opportunity to succeed on obtaining my degree." Additionally, May expressed dismay that all students do not have a mentor, especially the nontraditional students. May stated:

It's for the nursing students and we meet monthly to discuss recent events, campus events, health promotion. Basically, we're preparing to become nurses, so it's a whole bunch of different events, like what's going on in the community. We do outreach, like tomorrow I have a head to toe assessments, which means, I help students complete their head to toe assessment on a patient. So, it's also about peer mentorship as well and I'm also a peer mentor for my nursing program.

April and September both emphasized how all students, especially those students who are returning to school, should have a mentor throughout their tenure at AACC. July felt she lacked a mentor because she was fearful of the college atmosphere and did not feel comfortable in going through the beginning process. September wanted a mentor, but she did not know how she could obtain one.

I guess I want that mentor to have that support because even though I am not proficient in Math or English, they could understand my struggle with it all and say, "You know what, I, I struggled here in English and let me tell you what I had to do." That person needs to be, a positive person. You know what, even a person who is willing to just listen to me vent for a second. So, let's say the semester starts in August and ends in December, if we met once a month for 30 minutes ... and that mentor finds out what's going on with me at school, or you know, my classes and just to make sure that, "Okay, are you going to the math lab? Did you ask for it? Can we see if we can sign up for a specific tutor for math? Or don't you have...to talk to him, your professor?"

### **Conclusion**

This study explored the experiences of 10 nontraditional African-American female students who enrolled in a community college. I noted a key word that dominated each participant's reflection: perseverance. According to *Meriam Webster*, perseverance means "continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition". Following up on this idea of perseverance, these categories were then organized into three themes: personal support, college needs, and college support. Table 1 provides a visual of the relationship of the Themes to the Categories.

The first theme that emerged from the following categories was Personal Support: *participant's support, family support, stress and anxiety, faith, and motivation to learn*. This was

an important part of the phenomenon, because it pointedly affected all aspects of the phenomenon during the interviews when several participants related specifically to the support from family and friends. There was a lack of self-confidence that participants contributed to their stress and anxiety in the classroom. Additionally, the idea of having a meaningful career, being better able to provide for their families, and the motivation to learn were mentioned as the motivating factor for these women to return to college. The participants' family support included children, parents, and friends. Most of the women stated that their faith was very important.

Table 1

The Relationship of the Themes to the Categories

Themes	Categories
Personal Support	Participant's support Family support Stress and anxiety Faith Motivation to learn
College Needs	Community college access Coursework: classroom vs. online Time commitments to college
College Support	Programs and services Outreach to African American women Having a mentor

The second theme that emerged was College Needs. This theme is based on the categories: *community college access, coursework: classroom vs. online, and time commitments to college*. The important part of this theme is that the participants had to use the computers and Internet provided by the college. Most of the participants did not have access to a computer at home. Accordingly, they had to spend additional hours on campus to complete assignments. This phenomenon took time away from their family and social activities. Another significant finding of this study was the access to e-books. These nontraditional African -American females had to

learn how to access e-books; however, most of the participants preferred hard copies as textbooks for their classes.

The third theme focused on the actual College Support. The following categories were used to develop this theme: *programs and services, outreach to African American women, and having a mentor*. During the interviews, it was noted by many of the nontraditional African-American females that there should be more diversity in the staff and the instructors should be better trained to work with students of this demographic. Additionally, most of the participants who were returning to college, some starting college for the first time, mentioned that the staff was not very supportive. At the time of this research there was a program that was available to them called the Student Achievement and Success programs (SAS). Most of the participants stated this program was beneficial to them and their academic activities, however few of the participants were aware of the services that the program provided.

## CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

This chapter will discuss the findings of this study as they relate to the research questions and the literature. The first part will discuss each of the themes and discuss the relevance of the themes to the literature. The second part will present implications for practice and ways that community colleges can support nontraditional African-American female students. The third part will include recommendations for future research. The study was based on the following three research questions:

1. What were the external experiences (i.e., work, family, personal commitments) that impacted the participants' pursuit of their college degree?
2. What academic challenges did the participants face while attending community college?
3. How did the participants indicate that the community college could better support them to achieve their educational goals?

### Personal Support

Personal Support reflected the participants' experiences of how family and the community college supported them. The participants stated that family and financial assistance were more important than academic support. From the interviews it was apparent that family and financial assistance were important based on the participants' personal needs. This also addressed the first research question concerning experiences.

The word "support" was used extensively during this research. I noted that personal support included *support mechanisms, stress and anxiety release, the participant's faith and their motivation to learn*. Hackett (2002) stated African-American women often do not

understand the significance of support systems and how they sustain their social and academic success. According to Hackett (2002), lacking appropriate support systems, many African American women fail or drop out of college which results in limited career opportunities and a lower standard of life for their families, communities and themselves. Support included the academic and social fit between individuals and the institution is an important factor in determining persistence among African Americans in higher education. This indicates that higher educational institutions with vast minority student retention rates should recognize the importance of providing academic support systems, and personal support for these students during their academic careers. Similarly, it appears that these participants did not recognize or understand fully what support means. The nontraditional African-American participants in this study encountered many challenges and issues, in pursuit of education at their community college, including the lack of financial resources, mentoring, and balancing their jobs while pursuing their education.

In a recent study, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) (2016) noted that women have expressed conflict involving family and school. These women had to manage being a mother, while trying to complete their college education. In the CCSSE, Black males did not have the additional conflict of trying to be parents while balancing their educational goals. In contrast their male counterparts rarely mentioned family demands as a deterrent. In this study, “family support” is mentioned by all the participants. It was noticeable from the participants’ responses during the interviews how family served as a source of encouragement. It was important for me as the researcher to hear stories told by the participants describing how their families provided guidance and encouragement while they attended college.

The participants further stated that the reason for being enrolled in school for an extended amount of time was due to their lack of financial resources and the need to take remedial classes. In addition, it was difficult to manage their work schedule and academic goals and responsibilities. According to Callan et al. (2007), “nontraditional African-American female students are still only three-quarters as likely to complete a degree as their white counterparts” (pp. 20-21). The primary reason for this is their lack of financial resources. Despite the financial challenges, the findings of this study revealed that these nontraditional, female African-American students were determined and resilient. The participants described how they persevered and worked with limited resources until their educational goals were met. They were strong, yet fragile and they were proud women who were motivated to improve their circumstances.

This study’s findings support that “financial resources” are a primary reason for retention of African American students at the community college. According to the U. S. Department of Labor (2018), African American medium household income is \$40,000 compared to White American medium households’ income of \$68,000. With college tuition increasing each year, the cost of attending a community college is a significant barrier for many African-American women and men pursuing higher education. The U.S. Department of Education (2017) has reported that college tuition has increased eight times in the last ten years (2007-2017). This was supported by most of the participants of this study. Many of the participants worked full-time; they were only enrolled in school part-time due to financial resources. The primary concern mentioned by the participants was trying to balance work, life and family responsibilities. Trying to achieve a work/life balance caused most of the participants to take longer to complete their degree programs.



Gault et al. (2014) found that a third of all undergraduate women are mothers, and the majority of those are single mothers. Furthermore, these single mothers must balance the multiple responsibilities of school, parenthood, and jobs without the support of a spouse or partner. The participants in this study noted the increased financial burden with childcare and the cost of raising children. Student parents often take longer to complete their educational goals, then those without the responsibility of raising children while attending

In the Schumacher (2015) study, he mentioned, making community colleges more affordable for the nontraditional student parents. In addition, Schumacher mentioned community colleges should make the campus life for student parents more friendly which would include peer support networks. This was a major concern for the participants in this study who stated the cost of paying for college was a key issue that was mentioned by all the participants. Many of the participants only worked part-time, while trying to raise their children and would love a better support network.

One of the most significant findings dealt with the experiences of grandmothers returning to college and completing their educational degree. This appears to help fill a gap in the literature as only Thomas (2001) mentioned grandmothers in passing. Three participants who were grandmothers worked full-time and were raising second generation family members. In addition, several of the participants stated that they struggled in the classroom with their instructors; often the instructors tried to embarrass them, in front of the younger students, for being in school at a mature age. One of the grandmothers was not eligible for financial aid because she was over 60 years of age.

Although missing in the literature, the stress levels of managing family responsibilities, working full-time jobs, and paying for their own tuition, was discussed in-depth by the

participants in this study. Several of the participants stated they had changed jobs multiple times and had to quit school to regroup and return later.

### **College Needs**

The second theme that emerged from this research was *college needs*. This was important to the participants' success in completing their college degree. This also addresses the second research question concerning academic challenges.

Attwell, Heil, and Reisel (2011) stated that financial aid is one of the most important factors related to community college student success, and community college students rely heavily on financial aid, especially federal awards like the Pell Grant, to cover costs. In the 2016-17 academic year, the most recent year for which data are available, independent students accounted for approximately half of Pell recipients and spending. Community colleges serve more students than public four-year institutions (32%) and receive 29% of Pell funding. Over the decade from 2007-08 to 2016-08, expenditures spiked from \$17.2 billion in 2007-08 to \$40.1 billion in 2010-11, before falling back to \$28.2 billion in 2017 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Interviews revealed that several of the participants in this study stated that they never knew they were eligible until they heard about the Pell Grants from other students. At AACC, according to the participants, the Financial aid office and Registrar's Office do not work in tandem to support them. Financial aid was discussed by every participant in this study as being a major concern.

There were several studies on online learning for nontraditional students (e.g., Brower & Schejbal, 2016; Jagger, 2011; Xu & Jaggars, 2013). Jagger (2011) noted online learning offers access to college; online learning allowed the students to manage their time and commutes to and

from college. Several of the participants stated time management was an issue and classroom participation thus they preferred online vs classroom interactions.

Kurlaender and Howell (2012) found that many nontraditional students are not prepared for college work. Most must take remedial courses in order to prepare them for college courses. The cost involved is enormous and time consuming. This was a major issue for the participants in this study. This caused some of the participants to take remedial courses for years, often repeating math. However, whereas there is plenty of literature on taking remedial courses, there appears to be a gap in the literature concerning the cost of remedial courses versus credit hours. Many of the participants stated they spent years taking remedial courses and most of them paying for these courses out of their own finances. There is literature on remedial courses but not on the costs vs. college course credits. In addition, many of the participants stated their frustration of paying for non-credit hour courses. One of the participants had spent 13 years at AACC working on her associate degree. She began to take college credit courses in her 10<sup>th</sup> year at AACC.

### **College Support**

The third theme that emerged was the lack of knowledge of Community College Support, which included services that have assisted students in the past, including outreach to African-American women and providing programs and services. Bartman (2015) stated the lack of African-American women faculty and staff members working in institutions of higher education was a significant impact. Several of the participants stated that those students who are returning to school should have a mentor throughout their tenure at AACC. Chan et al. (2015) mentioned how important it is that mentors being multiculturally aware and competent, as well as skilled in converting cross-racial. Several of the participants stated AACC did not have a mentoring

program for them. From the study it was obvious that they were not informed of any mentoring program. This was confirmed by several of the participants.

A predominant discussion among the participants was the help they received from their mentors. According to Dickey (1997), “mentoring is an attractive approach to meeting the needs of students who are most at risk of leaving the university before graduation. It can improve retention rates by addressing some of the causes of attrition among culturally diverse students” (p. 1). Several of the participants indicated that once they were assigned a mentor who was “age appropriate,” their self-esteem and grades improved. They stated that a good mentoring program for nontraditional students would serve as an excellent support service. A close review of this study’s findings supports Dickey’s theory that nontraditional students are more successful academically when they have access to mentoring. Mentoring could support the retention rate for the demographic in this study. The present study’s findings suggest that for nontraditional African-American women, a principal factor in their success was having a mentor throughout their academic years. Mentoring may provide the additional support the participants needed to return to college at a nontraditional age and be successful. I feel the study by Dickey (1997) is still relevant today for nontraditional African-American females enrolled in a community college.

AACC did provide a service program called the Student Achievement and Success Programs (SAS) and support programs in math and English labs. Participants usually found out about the SAS program by word of mouth, later into their second semester, or not at all. Most of the participants stated they were disappointed that the information about of this program was never provided to them during orientation or registration. Several of the participants mentioned they felt that they would have left school if they did not have the support of math or English

tutors. The present study's results are supported by Engle and Tinto (2008) who found that community colleges that offer a range of services and support opportunities for students in their first semester have higher retention rates. The participants also indicated that there should be a program directly related to their demographic like the mentorship program that are tailored to black male students.

Ro & Loya (2015) stated that nontraditional students have an intersectionality framework. Intersectionality is a social identity theory where the social identities overlap, such as gender or class and race (Penner & Saperstein, 2013). This study supports these findings. Several of the participants mentioned how they felt uncomfortable in the classroom with younger students. Many of the participants stated they prefer taking online classes versus face to face interaction because they felt uncomfortable. In addition, many of the participants mentioned the bias in the classroom from the instructors towards them. Nontraditional students may find themselves at the intersection of multiple identities that include nontraditional age, veteran, or parent; students may also identify, among other social identities, as a female or racial minority or of low socioeconomic status (Ro & Loy, 2015).

Sealey-Ruiz's (2007) study examined how African-American adult female students respond to relevant curriculum. Her research indicated that adults enter college classrooms with a variety of experiences that they value experiences to which they connect. According to Sealey-Ruiz (2007) Black female students could perform better if they had a curriculum that spoke to individual experiences. In her study she stated the most prominent theme was language validation which included self-affirmation and a positive self-identity. Her findings reveal that the approach of integrating students' experiences as an explicit part as a learning agenda would encourage these students to participate in their educational goals. The findings in this study were that most of

the participants stated they were self-motivated at being in college. However, several of the participants stated they had difficulty writing papers on the college level. Additionally, the participants reported that the communication was poor with many of the instructors. Several of the participants felt the instructors singled them out in front of the younger students if they were doing poorly in class.

What I found was a gap in the literature is the need for online tutors and online mentors, and their availability for online courses. This was a significant finding that dealt with most of the participants stating they preferred online courses. The findings indicated that most participants felt they would have benefited from having more assistance with online courses. They also stated that they preferred online courses because they wanted to avoid face to face group interaction.

### **Implications for Practice**

The goal of this study was to offer a foundation for community colleges to examine the experiences of nontraditional, African-American female students. For theme one, Personal Support, community colleges should examine how nontraditional African-American female students fit into their overall mission. All the participants are self-motivated, they are resilient and determined to complete their educational goals. They have the opportunity implement programs to support and retained this student demographic. In theme two, College Needs, Nontraditional African-American women are more likely to enroll in remedial courses than their peers. Community colleges have an obligation to implement a program that support these students who take years of relentless remedial courses. Theme Three discussed the success or failure of the 10 nontraditional African-American female students in this study, which was predicated upon the lack of programs, and access to mentoring prior to and during orientation and at the community college. There are a few questions related to this: How can community colleges get

support to these participants? Secondly, how can institutions support and counsel these students as they proceed towards college-level courses they want to pursue?

While this was a study focused specifically on nontraditional African-American women, the study sample was small and only examines the support programs at AACC. It is my hope that community colleges in general will create a more in-depth support program based on the results provided in this study.

### **Nontraditional Support**

My first recommendation is related to the first theme. Several of the participants were self-sufficient and relied primarily on their family members for support. Many of these participants were older African-American women who worked part-time, or not at all, while pursuing their degree. Community colleges could support these women by developing applicable work experience programs for nontraditional students. This program could be called a Work Placement Program (WPP) for the students. Community colleges could offer this WPP program as a one credit-hour course the first and second year at no cost to the student. The WPP will assist students with employment needs and internships related to their desired program of study. The course for nontraditional women could include, but not be limited to, learning how to develop coping skills, self-esteem, and job search techniques. The course would give them the opportunity to explore career option related to their degree. The WPP class could build their self-confidence.

### **Adult Mentoring**

The second recommendation is to develop an adult focused mentoring program for nontraditional African-American female students. This theme emerged from the participants' feedback about not knowing that mentors were available at orientation. In this study there were

several programs that were available on campus, but most of the students were not aware of them. Mentoring was important to many of the participants in this study and several expressed the desire to be mentored from the beginning of their initial enrollment. College mentorship programs for students might help them learn of the support services available to them. Community colleges could also offer mentorship during orientation and prior to registration to ease some of the stress of returning to school, after being absent from the classroom for more than 20 years. This recommendation should assist with retention.

The orientation process could promote a comfortable format within which to meet and greet nontraditional, re-entry, female students. Institutions may want to consider new registrations methods for this demographic at orientation. The mentorship process would provide an overview of the courses that are required and the courses that are noncredit. In addition, the mentor could help and direct the student to the appropriate resources available such as computer lab, tutors and social and support programs such as SAS, which may be beneficial to their success.

### **Individual Development Plan**

The third recommendation which relates to the third theme of this study is to address students' feeling of being invisible on campus. Community colleges could implement an Individual Development Plan (IDP). Students would be assigned an academic counselor and that individual would follow the students from the time they entered through to graduation and follow up after they graduate. The IDP would include but would not be limited to the following: (a) enrollment process; (b) developing personal and academic goals; (c) academic requirements to complete the degree; and (d) providing and addressing any potential academic or other obstacles the student may be experiencing (i.e., issues with instructors, time management and financial aid



issues). The IDP program would require ongoing interaction or follow-up between the students and the counselor via email or face-to-face interaction. In general, the more interactions that students have with their instructors, the more likely they are to learn effectively and to proceed toward achievement of their educational goals. Through such interactions, faculty members can become mentors, and provide guidance for lifelong learning.

### **Workshop Program**

The fourth recommendation is to implement curriculum development workshops for nontraditional students to attend at all community colleges. Several participants mentioned that they felt invisible on campus and that there was stress from taking numerous remedial courses. This program could be offered as a cost reduction workshop; AACC could provide one credit hour, provided by the counseling department of the community college. This workshop would be a 6-week course available on the weekends and evenings and available for nontraditional, students. This workshop would include: (a) course enrollment; (b) time management; (c) financial aid; (d) remedial courses; (e) noncredit courses; and (f) online access tools; and (e) extracurricular activities. When the six-week course is completed, the student would receive one credit hour on their transcript.

### **Future Research**

There were many reasons for researching the experiences of nontraditional African-American women at a community college. First, I had firsthand experience through classroom observation as a visiting instructor. I saw firsthand the struggle that this demographic encountered with the basic concept of using a computer and the Internet. Secondly, I had a strong desire to provide guidance and leadership to women pursuing their education.

This study suggests that education continues to be a necessary means for survival. As

mentioned before, it is important that women stay involved with their education in the digital technology world in order to remain viable. In terms of future research, a study needs to be conducted to find out what the communication and resources are for nontraditional African-American females at the community college level. This study could ask the following questions: How can community colleges improve communication for nontraditional students? What resources can be improved or changed for nontraditional students?

Another recommended study would be to ask nontraditional African-American female students about their interactions with their instructors. It would be interesting to learn about how flexible they are when it comes to assignments. How often do nontraditional students turn their assignments in late or early? What kind of training could help instructors be more supportive of nontraditional females? Do nontraditional students require additional assistance outside of class? What community college policies have a direct impact on the retention of nontraditional African-American female students?

In this study, most of the participants had to enroll in remedial courses for two years. It would be tremendously useful to conduct a study on how many nontraditional African-American female students must take remedial courses at community colleges. How long are they enrolled in remedial classes before they can enroll in credit these classes? Also, when a nontraditional student does fail a remedial course are they charged to repeat the course? When nontraditional African-American female students do not complete or fail a course after multiple attempts, does the community college get involved or just dismiss them? What are the community college retention rates for nontraditional students who take remedial courses?

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived academic experiences that nontraditional African-American female students have at their community college. In this study nontraditional African-American female students' responsibilities included jobs, time constraints, such as raising children and grandchildren that limited their time to complete course work. Several women expressed their educational delays were due to financial resources. One woman recalled that it has taken her on a twenty-year educational journey. The findings in this study did align with the review of literature. With a sense of perseverance and hope these women demonstrated a strong desire to earn their college degree. All the women wanted to earn a college degree to improve their lives for themselves and their families.

As mentioned by the NCES (2018) adult women outnumber men in college. This qualitative study wanted to understand why nontraditional African-America women are motivated to continue their education despite the odds against them. As adult females continue to be a growing segment of community colleges, it is important for college administrators to understand their primary motivations for deciding return to college: which is to earn their educational degrees. Also, community college administrators must be able to support their unique needs. The research shows that even though women continue to enroll in high numbers it will be up to the community colleges to retain these demographics by paying attention to nontraditional class times specifically (evenings and weekends) and the load of needed remedial courses that could take years. Mentoring should be a priority with these women.

## REFERENCES

- Alfred, M. (2000). *The politics of knowledge and theory construction in adult education: A critical analysis from an Afrocentric feminist perspective*. Paper presented at the 2000 AERC Conference, Vancouver, BC, Canada. Retrieved from <https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2000/papers/2/>
- Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2013). *Changing course: Ten years of tracking online education in the United States*. Newburyport, MA: Sloan Consortium.
- Ashburn, E. (2007, November). Some community college students fall through the cracks in their first month. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, A30.
- Association of Community College Trustees. (2016). *Democracy's colleges: Call to action*. Washington, DC: The League for Innovation in the Community College, the National Institute for Staff & Organizational Development, and Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society.
- Attwell, P., Heil, S., & Reisel, L. (2011). Competing explanations of undergraduate noncompletion. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48(3), 536–559.
- Bailey, T., Alfonso, M., Scott, M., & Leinbach, T. (2003). *Educational outcomes of occupational postsecondary students*. New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.
- Bailey, T., & Zeindenberg, M. (2010). *Human resource development and career and technical education in American community colleges*. New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center
- Bartman, C. C. (2015). African American women in higher education: Issues and support strategies. *College Student Affairs Leadership*, 2(2). Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1020&context=csal>
- Bates, M. A. (2012). *From crisis to empowerment: African American women in community colleges* (Order No. 3545017). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1237219531).
- Belfield, C. R., & Bailey, T. (2011). The benefits of attending community college: A review of the evidence. *Community College Review*, 39(1), 46-48. doi:10.1177/0091552110395575
- Bell, D. (1993). *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*. New York: Basic Books.
- Blake-Beard, S., Bayne, M. L., Crosby, F. J., & Muller, C. B. (2011). Matching by race and gender in mentoring relationships: Keeping our eyes on the prize. *Journal of Social Issues*, 67(3), 622–643.

- Bohannon, R. L., & Bohannon, S. M. (2015). Mentoring: A decade of effort and personal impact. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 81(2), 31–36.
- Boressoff, T. (2013). *Financing campus childcare for college student success* (Report IWPR #G719). Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved from <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/financing-child-care-for-college-student-success>
- Brower, A., & Schejbal, D. (2016). *Navigating the CBE frontier: Creative and alternative student support for creative and alternative models of education*. Toronto, Ontario: The Evolution.
- Brown, J. O. (2001). *The portfolio: A reflective bridge connecting the learner, higher education, and the workplace*. doi:10.1080/07377366.2001.10400426
- Callan, P., Ewell, P. T., Finney, J. E., & Jones, D. P. (2007). *Improving outcomes and productivity in higher education: A guide for policymakers*. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED499122>
- Candy, P. C. (1991). *Self-direction for lifelong learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Carey, N., Lewis L., & Farris, E. (1996). *Parent involvement in children's education: Efforts by public elementary schools* (NCES 98-032). U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics.
- Chan, A. W., Yeh, C. J., & Krumboltz, J. D. (2015). Mentoring ethnic minority counseling and clinical psychology students: A multicultural, ecological, and relational model. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 62(4), 592– 607.
- Cohen, A., & Brawer, F. (2008). *The American community college* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Cohen, D., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). *Qualitative research guidelines project*. Retrieved from <http://www.qualres.org/HomeSemi-3629.html>
- Collins, P. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). (2016). *2016 Community college survey of student engagement*. Austin, TX: Center for Community College Student Engagement, The University of Texas at Austin.
- Constantine, M. G., & Sue, D. W. (2007). Perceptions of racial microaggressions among black supervisees in cross-racial dyads. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 54(2), 142-153. Retrieved from <https://psycnet.apa.org/buy/2007-04178-004>

- Cranton, P. (1994). *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide for educators of adults*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Crenshaw, K., Goyanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.). (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. New York, NY: New Press.
- Dahlvig, J. (2010). Mentoring of African American students at a predominantly White institution (PWI). *Christian Higher Education*, 9(5), 369–395.
- Davenport, J., & Davenport J. A. (1985). A chronology and analysis of the andragogy debate. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 35(3), 152-159.
- Deil-Amen, R., & Rosenbaum, J. (2002). The unintended consequences of stigma-free remediation. *Sociology of Education*, 75(3), 249–268.
- Deming, D. J., Goldin, C., Katz, L. F. & Yuchtman, N. (2015). *Can online learning bend the higher education cost curve?* Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Dickey, C. (1997, Spring). *Effects of quality mentoring of women students of color in higher education*. Retrieved from <http://www.mentoring-association.org/membersonly/FocusOfM/EffMofWomen.html>
- Donaldson, D., McKinney, L., Lee, M., & Pino, D. (2016). First-year community college students' perceptions of and attitudes toward intrusive academic advising. *NACADA Journal*, 36(1), 30–42. doi:10.12930/NACADA-15-012
- Duke-Benfield, A. E. (2015). *Bolstering non-traditional student success: A comprehensive student aid system using financial aid, public benefits, and refundable tax credits*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). Retrieved from <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Bolstering-NonTraditional-Student-Success.pdf>
- Ellis, C. M. (2002). Examining the pitfalls facing African American males. In L. Jones (Ed.), *Making it on broken promises: African American male scholars confront the culture of higher education* (pp. 61-72). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Engle, J., & Tinto, V. (2008). *Moving beyond access: College for low-income, first-generation students*. Washington, DC: The Pell Institute. Retrieved from [http://www.pellinstitute.org/files/COE Moving Beyond Report Final.pdf](http://www.pellinstitute.org/files/COE%20Moving%20Beyond%20Report%20Final.pdf)
- Engstrom, C., & Tinto, V. (2008). Access without support is not opportunity. *Change*, 40, 46-50. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ782160>
- Figlio, D., Rush, M., & Yin, L. (2013). Is It live or is it internet? Experimental estimates of the effects of online instruction on student learning. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 31(4), 763-784.

- Gault, B., Reichlin, L., Reynolds, E., & Froehner, M. (2014). *4.8 Million college students are raising children* (Fact Sheet IWPR #C424). Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved from <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/4-8-million-college-students-are-raising-children/>
- The Global Community for Academic Advising. (2016). *Academic advising resources*. Retrieved from <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse.aspx>.
- Grad-Edge. (2012). *Data sources: The role of community colleges on the pathway to graduate degree attainment*. Retrieved from <http://www.cgsnet.org/data-sources-role-community-colleges-pathway-graduate-degree-attainment-0>
- Green, A. (2013). *Babies, books, and bootstraps: Low-income mothers, material hardship, Role strain and the quest for higher education* (Doctoral dissertation, Boston College). Retrieved from <http://www.proquest.com/products-services/pqdtglobal.html>
- Guerra, M. (2013). *The state of African American women in the United States*. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/SOW-factsheet-AA.pdf>
- Guy, T. (1999). Culturally relevant adult education: Key themes and common purposes. In T. Guy (Ed.), *Providing culturally relevant adult education: A challenge for the twenty first century* (pp. 93-98). San Francisco: Jossey -Bass.
- Hackett, T. J. (2002). Survival strategies for African-American women in community colleges. *Learning Abstracts – World Wide Web Edition*, 5(11). Retrieved from <http://www.league.org>
- Hart, C., Friedmann, E., & Hill, M. (2014). *Online course-taking and student outcomes in California community colleges*. Albuquerque, NM: Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management.
- Horn, L., & Carroll, C. D. (1996). *Nontraditional undergraduates, trends in enrollment from 1986 to 1992 and persistence and attainment among 1989–90 beginning postsecondary students* (NCES 97–578). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Howard-Hamilton, M. F. (2003). Theoretical frameworks for African American women. *New Directions for Student Services*, 104, 19–27.
- Huang, H. (2000). Instructional technologies facilitating online courses. *Educational Technology*, 40(4), 41-46.
- Huelsman, M., & Engle, J. (2013). *Student parents and financial aid* (Working Paper). Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved from

<http://www.iwpr.org/initiatives/student-parent-success-initiative/student-parents-and-financialaid/view>

- Hughes, K. L., & Scott-Clayton, J. (2011). Assessing developmental assessment in community colleges. *Community College Review*, 39(4), 327–351.
- Hunn, L. (2010). Afrocentric philosophy: A remedy for Eurocentric dominance. In R. St. Clair & J. A. Sandlin (Eds.), *Promoting critical practice in adult education* (pp. 65-74). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Imel, S. (2001). *Learning technologies in adult education*. Retrieved from <https://calpro-online.org/ERIC/docs/mr00032.pdf>
- The Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2012). *College remediation: What it is. What it costs. What's at stake?* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/publications/a-f/ CollegeRemediation.pdf>.
- Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR). (2016). *Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2014–15 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:12)*. Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research.
- Jackson, J. P. (2001). *Social scientists for social justice: Making the case against segregation*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Jagger, S. (2011). *Online learning: Does it help low-income and underprepared students?* Retrieved from <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/online-learning-low-income-underprepared.html>
- Jaggars, S. S., & Bailey, T. (2010). *Effectiveness of fully online courses for college students: Response to a Department of Education meta-analysis*. Community College Research Center.
- Jenkins, D. (2011, April). *Get with the program: Accelerating community college students' Entry into and completion of programs of study* (CCRD Working Paper No. 32). New York, NY: Community College Research Center at Columbia University.
- Johnson-Bailey, J. (2001). *Sista's in college: Making a way out of no way*. Malabar, FL: Krieger.
- Jones, L. (2009). Claiming your connections: A psychosocial group intervention study of black college women. *Social Work Research*, 33, 159-171.
- Karp, M. M., O'Gara, L., & Hughes, K. L. (2008). *Do support services at community colleges encourage success or reproduce disadvantage? An exploratory study in two community colleges* (CCRC Working Paper No. 10). New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.



- Kasworm, C. E. (2010). Adult learners in a research university: Negotiating undergraduate student identity. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 60, 143–160. doi:10.1177/0741713609336110
- Knowles, M. S. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Chicago, IL: Follett.
- Knowles, M. S. (1989). *The making of an adult educator*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Knowles, M. S., & Associates. (1984). *Andragogy in action. Applying modern principles of adult education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Cruce, T., Shoup, R., & Gonyea, R. M. (2007). *Connecting the dots: Multi-faceted analyses of the relationships between student engagement results from the NSSE, and the institutional practices and conditions that foster student success*. Bloomington, IN: Center for Postsecondary Research. Retrieved from [http://nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/Connecting\\_the\\_Dots\\_Report.pdf](http://nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/Connecting_the_Dots_Report.pdf)
- Kurlaender, M., & Howell, J. S. (2012). *Collegiate remediation: A review of the causes and consequences*. New York, NY: College Board Advocacy & Policy Center. Retrieved from <https://research.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/publications/2014/9/collegiate-remediation-review-causes-consequences.pdf>.
- Lin, X. (2016). Barriers and challenges of female adult students enrolled in higher education: A literature review. *Higher Education Studies*, 6(2), 119–126. doi:10.5539/hes.v6n2p119
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC). (2015). *Year-round financial aid: Evidence from three studies*. New York, NY: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.
- Merriam, S. B. (2001). Andragogy and self-directed learning: Pillars of adult learning theory. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 89, 3-14. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S., Caffarella, R., & Baumgartner, L. (2007). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2011). *Community college student outcomes: 1994-2009*. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012253.pdf>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). *Who is nontraditional?* Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs/web/97578e.asp>

- National Center for Education Statistics. (2017a). *The condition of education*. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2017144>.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2017b). *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)*. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2017c). *Enrollment*. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2017d). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic groups*. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017051.pdf>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). *Digest of education statistics: 2018* (Table 330.10). Retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18\\_330.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_330.10.asp)
- National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2015). *Contribution of two-year institutions to four-year completions* (Snapshot Report). Herndon, VA: Author.
- Niu, S. X. (2015). Leaving home state for college: Differences by race/ethnicity and parental education. *Res High Education*, 56(4), 325-359. doi:10.1007/s11162-014-9350-y
- Orozco, V., & Cauthen, N. K. (2009). *Work less, study more, & succeed: How financial supports can improve postsecondary success*. New York, NY: Demos. Retrieved from [http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/WorkLessStudyMore\\_Demos.pdf](http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/WorkLessStudyMore_Demos.pdf)
- Park-Saltzman, J., Wada, K., & Mogami, T. (2012). Culturally sensitive mentoring for Asian international students in counseling psychology. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 40(6), 895–915.
- Parsad, B., & Lewis, L. (2008). *Remedial education at degree-granting postsecondary institutions in fall 2000*. Retrieved from National Center for Education Statistics website: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2004/2004010.pdf>
- Penner, A. M., & Saperstein, A. (2013). Engendering racial perceptions: An intersectional analysis of how social status shapes race. *Gender & Society*, 27, 319–344. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243213480262>
- Peterson, E. A. (1999). Creating a culturally relevant dialogue for African American adult educators. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, 82, 79-91. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Petraglia, J. (1998). The real world on a short leash: The (mis)application of constructivism to the design of educational technology. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 46(3), 53-65.

- Provanik, S., & Planty, M. (2008). *Community colleges: Special supplement to the condition of education 2008*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences.
- Rifenbary, D. (1995). Reentering the academy: The voices of returning women students. *Initiatives*, 55(4), 1-10.
- Ro, H. K., & Loya, K. I. (2015). The effect of gender and race intersectionality on student learning outcomes in engineering. *Review of Higher Education*, 38, 359–396. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2015.0014>
- Rodgers, K., Blunt, S., & Tribble, L. (2014). A real PLUS: An intrusive advising program for underprepared STEM students. *NACADA Journal*, 34(1), 35-42. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.12930/NACADA-13-002>
- Rose, A., & Hill, C. (2010). *Why so few? Women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED509653.pdf>
- Rosenbaum, J. E. (2001). *Beyond college for all*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Schumacher, R. (2015). *Prepping colleges for parents: Strategies for supporting student parent success in postsecondary education* (Working Paper IWPR #C406). Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved from <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/prepping-colleges-forparents-strategies-for-supporting-student-parent-success-in-postsecondary-education>
- Sealey-Ruiz, Y. (2007). Wrapping the curriculum around their lives: Using a culturally relevant curriculum with African American adult women. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 58, 44-60. doi:10.1177/0741713607305938
- Sims, J., Vidgen, R., & Powell, P. (2008). *E-learning and the digital divide*. Retrieved from <https://aisel.aisnet.org/cais/vol22/iss1/23/>
- Smith, B. (2007). Accessing social capital through the academic mentoring process. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 40(1), 35–46.
- Smith, J., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method, and research*. London, UK: Sage.
- Snyder, T., & Dillow, S. (2017). *Digest of education statistics: 2017 National Center for Education Statistics*. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018070.pdf>
- Sommo, C., Mayer, A., Rudd, T., & Cullinan, D. (2016). *Commencement day: Six-year effects of a freshman learning communities' program at Kingsborough Community College*. New York: MDRC.

- Spalter-Roth, R., Shin, J. H., Mayorova, O. V., & White, P. E. (2013). The impact of cross-race mentoring for “Ideal” PhD careers in sociology. *Sociological Spectrum*, 33(6), 484–509.
- Spence, C. N. (2004). *Instructing the African American college student: Strategies for success higher education*. Cambridge, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Stout, F. (2000, August 23). Overcoming the anxiety of going off to college. *The Washington Times*, p. 4.
- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62, 271–286. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271
- Swail, W. S. (2004). *The art of student retention: A handbook for practitioners and administrators*. Austin, TX: Educational Policy Institute.
- Taylor, E. W. (1998). *The theory and practice of transformative learning: A critical review* (Information Series No. 374). Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education.
- Thomas, V. G. (2001). Educational experiences and transitions of reentry college women: Special considerations for African American female students. *Journal of Negro Education*, 20(3), 139. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/pss/3211206>
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the cause and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Tinto, V. (2004). *Student retention and graduation: Facing the truth, living with the consequences*. Washington, DC: The Pell Institute.
- Tinto, V. (2015). Through the eyes of students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*. doi:10.1177/1521025115621917
- Tuitt, F. (2010). Enhancing visibility in graduate education: Black women's perceptions of inclusive pedagogical practices. *International Journal of Teaching & Learning in Higher Education*, 22(3), 246–257.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2017a). *Women in the United States: March 2000* (PPL- 121). Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/ppl-121.html>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2017b). *U.S. Census Bureau projections show a slower growing, older, more diverse nation a half century*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-243.html>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2017). *Think college early: Average college costs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

- U.S. Department of Education. (2018). *Performance measure analysis: 36-month performance of FY2012 grantees. Childcare access means parents in school program*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- U.S. Department of Labor. (2018). *Highlights of women's earnings in 2013*. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpswom2010.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Labor. (2019). *Department of Labor*. Retrieved from <http://www.dol.gov>
- Varney, J. (2012). Proactive (intrusive) advising! *Academic Advising Today*, 35(3). Retrieved from <http://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today-View-Articles/Proactive-Intrusive-Advising.aspx>
- Visher, M. G., Weiss, M. J., Weissman, E., Rudd, T., & Wathington, H. (2015). *The effects of learning communities for students in developmental education: A synthesis of findings from six community colleges*. New York, NY: MDR.
- Wilsey, S. A. (2013). Comparisons of adult and traditional college-age student mothers: Reasons for college enrollment and views of how enrollment affects children. *Journal of College Student Development*, 54(2), 209-214. doi:10.1353/csd.013.001
- Xu, D., & Jaggars, S. S. (2011). The effectiveness of distance education across Virginia's community colleges: Evidence from introductory college-level math and English courses. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 33(3), 360-377.
- Xu, D., & Jaggars, S. S. (2013). The impact of online learning on students' course outcomes: Evidence from a large community and technical college system. *Economics of Education Review*, 37, 46-57.

## APPENDIX A

### Recruitment Poster



**AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE STUDENTS**

**Tell your success story**

**Research Participants Sought**

- ⇒ Are you 25 years old or older?
- ⇒ Have you been enrolled for one year?
- ⇒ Completed 12 Credit Hours?

**I am conducting a research study on the "Community College Experience as Perceived by Nontraditional African-American Female Students"**  
My name is Angela Y. Mauney and I am a doctoral student at Colorado State University. I am a Veteran.  
**Participation is voluntary.**  
**Steps to participate:**

1. Let me know you want to participate by filling out the online enrollment form at [www.amauney.com](http://www.amauney.com)
2. Meet me in person for 30 minutes to discuss the study and your participation.
3. Participate in up to two additional interviews last 45-90 minutes

**You will receive a \$20.00 Starbucks gift card if you participate in all interviews.**

**Overall Anticipated Benefit:** This study will tell your story about what you experience at your local community college. The community college and faculty may all benefit by better understanding what you experienced and may develop better ways to support your educational needs.

**Location:** Maryland, District of Columbia

**Interviews will be audio taped**



**Enroll at:**  
[www.amauney.com](http://www.amauney.com)

**Contacts:**  
**Angela Y. Mauney** [amauney28@gmail.com](mailto:amauney28@gmail.com)  
**Primary Investigator Timothy Davies, Ph.D.**  
[grdvies13@gmail.com](mailto:grdvies13@gmail.com)

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Consent To Participate In A Research Study**

#### **Colorado State University**

**TITLE OF STUDY:** Community College Experience as Perceived by Nontraditional African-American Female Students: A Phenomenological Study

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Dr. Timothy G. Davies, Ph.D., School of Education, Advisor  
(xxx) xxx-xxxx

**CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Angela Y. Mauney School of Education, Doctoral  
Candidate, (678) 642-6674

**WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?** You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a nontraditional African- American female who can provide information on your experience at your local Community College.

**WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?** My name is Angela Y. Mauney and I am a doctoral candidate at Colorado State University. I am also a Veteran of the United States Military, Visiting Professor, and Cybersecurity Management Analyst for the Federal Government. Dr. Timothy Davies is my advisor and is helping me with the study.

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?** The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences that nontraditional African-American females have at their community college. This study hopes to tell your story about what you experienced while enrolled in the community college.

**WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?** This study will take place in Maryland from August 2016-October 2016. You will be asked to participate in a 30-minute meeting with me to discuss the study and your participation. You will then attend up to three additional interviews lasting from 60-90 minutes each. Your total approximate time commitment is up to 3 hours spaced out between several separate meetings preferably during a one-month time frame. A mutually convenient location will be selected based upon your schedule and location.

**WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?** You will attend a 30-minute meeting with me to discuss the study and your participation. You will then attend up to three additional one-on-one interviews with the researcher at a mutually convenient location or in a secure online meeting room. During these interviews, you will be asked a series of questions related to your background, your experiences at your community college and your experiences of taking a course. The audio of these interviews will be recorded and maintained securely by me. During the final interview, I will provide you a written copy of your interviews and my analysis of them and you will be asked to check my understanding of your experiences and add to or correct items.

**ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?** You should not participate in this research if you do not fit the criteria or that you have not completed at least 12 credit hours on your transcript.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?**

- This study will discuss experiences that you have while you attend your community college.
- It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but I have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?** While you may not directly benefit from this study, it may help other nontraditional African-American female students enrolled in community colleges and faculty to better understand the challenges that you faced by taking classes while balancing your other priorities. This may lead to better support services for nontraditional African –American female students who are enrolled in community colleges in the future.

**DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?** Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE?** You may be asked to commute to the interview locations. The cost of the commute, either through public transportation or personal transportation, is your responsibility.

**WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?** I will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

For this study, I will assign a code to your data (*January, February etc.*) so that the only place your name will appear in our records is on the consent and in our data spreadsheet which links you to your code. Only I will have access to the link between you, your code, and your data. The only exceptions to this are if I am asked to share the research files for audit purposes with the CSU Institutional Review Board ethics committee, if necessary.

You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which I may have to show your information to other people

Your identity/record of receiving compensation (NOT your data) may be made available to CSU officials for financial audits.

**CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?** If you fail to show up to each scheduled face-to-face or online interview session, you may be removed from the study.



**WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?** You will receive a total of \$20.00 Starbucks gift card if you participate in all three interviews as a token of our appreciation for your time.

**WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Angela Y. Mauney at 678-642-6674. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research on.

**WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?** Please initial next to each item below giving your consent for the item.

\_\_\_\_\_ **I agree to participate in a 30-minute screening meeting.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I agree to participate in up to 3 additional and separate interviews from 60-90 minutes each.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I agree to the recording of the audio and/or online sessions being recorded during the interviews.**

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 3 pages.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person providing information to participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Research Staff

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Interview One Questions**

The guiding questions:

- What are you studying at AACC?
- Are you aware of the services available at AACC? (Student, Academic, Financial, Tutoring, Math, English and Computer etc.)
- Did you take remedial courses at AACC?
- Have you used any of the services at AACC?
- What was your experience with using these services?
- Have you used the computer prior to enrolling at AACC?
- What was your experience using the computer?
- Do you use the local transit service?
- Do you have your own transportation to school?
- Short term goals?

## APPENDIX D

### Interview Two Questions

The second interview will focus on the phenomenon and the lived experiences of the participants.

1. Tell me about your experience of taking courses at AACC?
  - a. Did you take any online courses during your first year?
  - b. What are were your goals after you receive your degree?
  - c. Did you get recruited by colleges offering scholarships, additional financial assistance? If so, what types of things were they promising if you enrolled at their community college?
  - d. Are there any other institutions did you take your any other college courses?
  - e. How did you choose that AACC?
  - f. What % if time are you on a campus?
  - g. Could you describe your living situation during college?
  - h. What resources were available to you?
  - i. What technologies were available to you?
  - j. Are you aware of the services available at AACC? (Student, Academic, Financial, Tutoring, Math, English and Computer etc.)
  - k. Have you used any of the services at AACC?
  - l. What was your experience with using these services?
  - m. Have you used the computer prior to enrolling at AACC?
  - n. What was your experience using the computer?
  - o. What on campus educational resources were available to you?
  - p. Did you utilize these? Please explain.
  - q. Were there any off campus educational resources available to you?
2. Now were going to talk more specifically about your courses.
  - a. Did you have any trouble registering for courses?
  - b. How did you know what courses to take?
  - c. Could you describe your course(s)?
  - d. Did you have any face-to-face meetings?
  - e. What technologies did you use for taking the online/on campus course(s)?
  - f. Did you use your own computer?
  - g. Did you have to download or install any software?
  - h. When you are working online what resources did you use, i.e. textbook?
  - i. Were you able to access the online library? Tutoring services
  - j. Did your professor know you were employed part/fulltime while enrolled?
    - i. How did they know you were employed?

- ii. Did they do anything special to help you be successful in your course(s)?
    - iii. Was the professor fair to you during the course(s)?
    - iv. How would you describe the professors' role in the course(s)?
    - v. Do you feel that the professor interacted with you in a manner which facilitated your learning in the course room?
  - k. Did the other students in your course(s) know you were employed during the course(s)?
    - i. Did you ever discuss your employment and taking college courses with other students?
    - ii. Do other students assist you with your courses?
  - l. Did you receive any negative interactions from other students because you are a single mom?
  - m. Where did you complete the online materials?
  - n. When did you typically do your schoolwork?
  - o. Why did you choose to work on the day(s) and time(s) of day?
  - p. How did you communicate with others in the course?
    - i. How often did you communicate with others in the course(s)?
    - ii. What communication required for your grade in the course(s)?
  - q. Did you experience technical issues during hybrid/online? /classroom course(s)?
    - i. If so, what technical problems did you have?
    - ii. How did you handle this/these problems?
    - iii. How did you receive help with this/these problems?
  - r. How many hours a week, on average, did you spend on college work?
  - s. Did your family ever have to help you with something in your course?
3. Thoughts and feelings about the experience of attending college in the nontraditional sense
- a. What were the biggest obstacles for completing the college courses in a timely manner?
  - b. How did you handle the stress of working and going to college and being a parent?
  - c. How did you balance missions and community college work?
  - d. Did you ever fall behind in your course work? How did you handle this?
  - e. How did the communication in any of the course help you? Hurt you?
  - f. What was the most difficult challenge for you at the AACC?
  - g. Did anything frustrate you in the classroom? Could you describe it in detail?
    - i. How did you cope with this event?
    - ii. How did this event affect you emotionally?
  - h. Did this effect your motivation to continue your college?
  - i. How did this experience affect your view of your educational goals?
  - j. Do you feel like you would have learned more had you taken 2 courses per semester as opposed to 3 courses per semester?
  - k. Do you feel you would have learned more if you did not have to work?
3. Now we will discuss the support you received during your enrollment at AACC.
- a. Were you able to access resources, like the library, tutors during your time at AACC? Did you utilize any special services to help you be successful?
  - b. What does your family/employer think of you taking courses with other responsibilities?
  - c. Did your job work around your need to be in courses or complete homework?

- d. Did you experience any problems or issues with your working part-time/full-time or and being a parent while enrolled at AACC?
- e. Did you receive negative responses to your participation in social activities at school by anyone during your college the enrollment? If so, by who and how did you handle that negativity?