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## The Lived Experiences of African American Male Students: An Exploration of African American Male Student Athletes and African American Male Student Nonathletes at California Community Colleges

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The Lived Experiences of African American Male Students: An Exploration of African  
American Male Student Athletes and African American Male Student Nonathletes at  
California Community Colleges

A Dissertation by

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Brandman University

Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

July 2020

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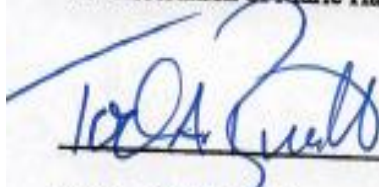
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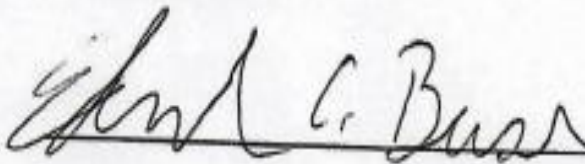
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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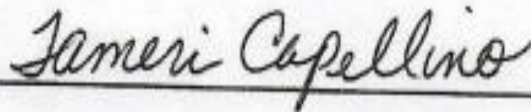
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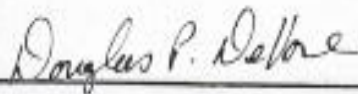
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The Lived Experiences of African American Male Students: An Exploration of African  
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California Community Colleges

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## ABSTRACT

The Lived Experiences of African American Male Students: An Exploration of African American Male Student Athletes and African American Male Student Nonathletes at California Community Colleges

by Marie Harris

**Purpose:** The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and differences between African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges.

**Methodology:** The methodology of this study is a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of African American males who are student athletes and those who are student nonathletes enrolled at three California community colleges. In-depth and semistructured interviewing techniques were utilized to capture their stories.

**Findings:** There were 9 major findings that emerged through the data collection and analysis. The findings showed that African American males who were low-income first-generation college students experience challenges at California community colleges, African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes experience struggles, challenges, and hardships throughout their lives, friendships and peer relationships are important among African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges, African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes need informal faculty and staff relationships at California community colleges, and academic supports are important for African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes to persist at California community colleges.

**Conclusions:** The conclusions highlighted that both African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes experience barriers and challenges at California community colleges. The conclusions showed that all African American males in this study need social support from faculty, staff, friends, and peers. The conclusions also showed that the African American males in this study need academic supports to experience success at California community colleges.

**Recommendations:** Recommendations include connecting African American males with resources that will meet their basic needs while in college. It is also recommended that African American males be provided with mentors and systems of support that will assist in their success while attending California community colleges. Additionally, African American males need targeted academic supports throughout their enrollment in California community colleges.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Higher Educational Snapshot of African American Males .....	2
Background .....	4
History of Community College System .....	4
Overview of California Community College System .....	5
Challenges Faced by California Community Colleges .....	6
Higher Education Outcomes of African American Males .....	7
Community College and African American Males .....	9
Community College African American Male Student Athletes .....	10
Individual Characteristics of African American Male Student Athletes .....	10
Support Systems for African American Males as Students and Athletes .....	11
Statement of the Research Problem .....	12
Purpose Statement .....	15
Research Questions .....	15
Significance of the Problem .....	16
Definitions .....	17
Delimitations .....	19
Organization of the Study .....	19
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	21
History of California Community Colleges .....	21
Origin of Community Colleges .....	21
Purpose of Community Colleges .....	23
Structure of Community Colleges .....	24
The Experiences of African American Males .....	26
Poverty .....	26
Racism .....	28
Police Brutality .....	30
Trauma .....	31
Educational Outcomes of African Americans .....	33
High School .....	34
Community College .....	35
Four-Year Universities .....	38
College Student Athletes .....	40
Challenges .....	40
Successes .....	42
Academic Athletic Eligibility .....	43
High School Eligibility .....	44
College Eligibility .....	46
The Experiences of African American Males at Community Colleges .....	48
The Experiences of African American Male Athletes at Community Colleges .....	50
Barriers to Higher Educational Success Among African American Males .....	52
Stereotypes, Racism, and Racial Bias .....	52
Financial Issues .....	54

Unpreparedness .....	56
California Community College Athletic Association.....	57
Characteristics of California Community College Female and Male Intercollegiate Student Athletes .....	58
Supporting African American Males in Community College .....	59
Academic Supports .....	60
Social Supports .....	62
Theoretical Framework.....	64
Framework of Institutional Action .....	65
Academic Supports .....	65
Financial Supports .....	67
Social Supports .....	68
Summary .....	70
 CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY .....	 71
Overview .....	71
Purpose Statement .....	71
Research Questions .....	71
Research Design .....	71
Qualitative Methodology .....	72
Phenomenology .....	75
Population .....	76
Target Population .....	77
Sample .....	79
Instrumentation.....	81
Interviews .....	82
Role of the Researcher .....	83
Bias.....	83
Validity .....	84
Reliability.....	86
Ethical Considerations .....	86
Data Collection.....	87
Data Analysis .....	88
Limitations .....	89
Summary .....	89
 CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS .....	 91
Purpose.....	91
Research Questions .....	91
Methodology .....	91
Profile of the College of the Sequoias, Fresno City College, and Merced Community College .....	95
College of the Sequoias.....	95
Fresno City College .....	96
Merced Community College .....	96
Population/Sample.....	97
Interviews and Interview Process.....	99

Demographic Data.....	100
Presentation of the Data by Themes .....	102
A. The Struggle is Real.....	103
B. Social Supports are Needed .....	108
C. We all we got .....	110
D. Informal Faculty and Staff Relationships are Important.....	113
E. Academic Supports are Important.....	115
F. Academic Supports are Needed.....	119
G. Financial Support is a Must .....	120
H. I Wanted Better for Myself.....	122
I. The Coursework is Difficult .....	123
J. Financial Challenges .....	124
L. Being a Black Athlete is a Challenge .....	125
Summary .....	125
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	128
Purpose Statement .....	128
Research Questions .....	128
Research Methods .....	128
Population and Sample .....	130
Major Findings .....	131
Major Finding 1: African American Males Who Are Low-Income First- Generation College Students Experience Challenges at California Community Colleges.....	131
Major Finding 2: African American Male Student Athletes Experience Struggles, Challenges, and Hardships Throughout Their Lives .....	132
Major Finding 3: Friendships and Peer Relationships Are Important Among African American Male Student Athletes in California Community Colleges .....	133
Major Finding 4: African American Male Student Athletes Need Informal Faculty and Staff Relationships at California Community Colleges .....	134
Major Finding 5: Academic Supports Are Important for African American Male Student Athletes to Persist at California Community Colleges .....	135
Major Finding 6: African American Male Student Nonathletes Experience Struggles, Challenges, and Hardships Throughout Their Lives .....	136
Major Finding 7: Academic Supports Are Important for African American Male Student Nonathletes to Persist at California Community Colleges .....	138
Major Finding 8: Friendships and Peer Relationships Are Important Among African American Male Student Nonathletes at California Community Colleges .....	139
Major Finding 9: African American Male Student Nonathletes Need Informal Faculty and Staff Relationships at California Community Colleges .....	139
Conclusions.....	140
Conclusion 1: African American Males Encounter Challenges at California Community Colleges.....	140
Conclusion 2: African American Males Need Social Supports to Experience Success at California Community Colleges .....	142

Conclusion 3: African American Males Need Academic Supports Experience Academic Success at California Community Colleges .....	144
Conclusion 4: African American Male Student Athletes and Student Nonathletes Have Similar Experiences at California Community Colleges .....	145
Implications for Action.....	146
Implication 1: Connect African American Male Student Athletes to Community Resources .....	146
Implication 2: California Community Colleges Need to Foster a More Supportive Environment Toward African American Male Student Athletes.....	147
Implication 3: Provide all African American Male Student Athletes With a Personal Tutor.....	148
Implication 4: Provide African American Male Student Nonathletes With Structured Supports Who Attend California Community Colleges.....	148
Implication 5: Provide Comprehensive Mentoring Programs to African American Male Student Nonathletes at California Community Colleges .....	149
Implication 6: Provide All College Faculty and Staff With Training to Address Unconscious Bias .....	150
Recommendations for Further Research.....	151
Concluding Remarks .....	152
Personal Reflections .....	154
REFERENCES.....	156
APPENDICES.....	217

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. San Joaquin Valley Young Men of Color Community College Data.....37

Table 2. Division 1 High School Student Athlete Requirements to Play College  
Sports.....45

Table 3. Academic Collegiate Student Athlete Eligibility .....48

Table 4. Ethnic Breakdown of Student Athletes and Student Nonathletes .....59

Table 5. Alignment of Research Questions .....93

Table 6. Demographic Data of Participants ..... 101

Table 7. The Differences in Responses Among African American Male Student  
Athletes and African American Student Nonathletes at Community  
Colleges ..... 103

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Division 2 high school student athlete academic college eligibility requirements .....46

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Education is a global resource that provides information, enhances thinking, develops skills, and creates a sense of responsibility that influence a person's life and work. According to Ortiz-Ospina, Beltekian, and Roser (2018), higher education produces increased individual income and contributes toward the creation of social capital and long-term economic growth. Public economic benefits of an education include independence from government assistance, flexibility, buying and spending power, whereas private benefits include higher salary and benefits, employment, higher savings level, improved working conditions, and personal and professional mobility (Percy & Svenson, 2016). In 2018, full-time workers age 25 and over without a high school diploma had average weekly earnings of \$556, compared to \$736 for high school graduates with no college, and \$1,338 for those awarded a bachelor's degree (Torpey, 2019). Among all racial and ethnic groups working full-time jobs, the average weekly earnings for African Americans were \$724, \$696 for Hispanics, with both groups earning much lower than Whites at \$933 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019b). In contrast, among those with advanced degrees, African American males earned an average of \$1,653 while White males earned an average of \$2,412 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019b).

The benefit of a college degree enhances the life for adults seeking economic growth, career options, is emotionally satisfying, and overall, provides a better quality of life and healthier people (Baum, Kurose, & Ma, 2013; Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016). Individuals enter college with a goal to attain a quality education potentially leading to a certificate, degree, or transfer. Community colleges are committed to meeting local

education needs offering academic programs and student activities but most importantly, allowing public admission to higher education (Pusser & Levin, 2009).

The California community colleges are governed by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) and constitute the largest system of higher education in the nation, with 2.1 million students attending 114 colleges (Public Policy Institute of California [PPIC], 2016). In the fall of 2017, the enrollment for first-time students was 246,845, of which African Americans only comprised 6% (CCCCO, 2018). Therefore, African Americans are less likely to be enrolled in a community college and are less likely to earn a college degree than other ethnicities.

### **Higher Educational Snapshot of African American Males**

African American males play a vital role in contributing to the American society, yet there is a huge disparity in outcomes in the area of education and employment. Researchers have discovered that African American undergraduate males are less prepared for college-level rigor than their peers from other racial groups (Bailey, 2017; Bragg & Durham, 2012; Horton, 2015; Urias & Wood, 2014). African American males also lag behind their female counterparts and are less likely to complete their degree (Harper & Harris, 2012; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011; Matthews-Whetstone & Scott, 2015). Overall, there is a lack of African American males on almost every indicator of academic achievement (Dulabaum, 2016; Mejia, Rodriguez, & Johnson, 2016; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). Urias and Wood (2014) found that the majority (54.9%) of African American males will attend 2-year colleges and 11.8% of those will leave within their first year without return.



A postsecondary degree is predicted to be required for two-thirds of jobs in the United States (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). As attainment needs continue to predict growth, a shortage of workers with postsecondary credentials will be detrimental to the sustainability of the economy (Baber, 2014). In the United States, adults (25-34 years old) earned at least an associate's degree while only 22% of African American males in the same age group earned an associate's degree (Baber, 2014; Ryu, 2010). College enrollment of African American males comprise 36% of total overall college enrollment (Baber, 2014). These inequalities are troubling taking into consideration the 14.3% compared to 8.1% unemployment rate of African American males and the need for postsecondary completion in the workforce (Baber, 2014).

African American males benefit when they attend institutions of higher education. The potential for a college degree increases their opportunity to join the workforce, earn a livable wage, and contribute to society. Educational success rates remain low for African American males and completing college continues to be a struggle. African American males face many challenges such as racial and athletic stereotypes, spending too much time on athletics and not academics, a lack of campus involvement, a lack of mentors and relationships with staff and faculty, mental issues, finances, and family obligations (S. M. Harris, 2018; Hinojosa, Nguyen, Sellers, & Elassar, 2019; Hotchkins, 2016; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Lancaster & Xu, 2017; Simiyu, 2012; Wood, 2014). Therefore, the aim of this study is to provide higher educational institutions with a plan for supporting African American males both at the community college and university levels.

## **Background**

### **History of Community College System**

The community college system operated as independent regions until 1917 (Drury, 2003). During that time, community colleges focused on offering liberal arts courses that transferred to a 4-year college. A critical time of evolution for community colleges was in 1920 when the American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC) was founded (Drury, 2003). The Great Depression caused a drastic increase in community college enrollment. College education was seen as the path for “social and economic upward mobility,” which played a major role in expansion of the community colleges (Drury, 2003, p. 2).

As decades passed, the community college system faced scrutiny as to whether their inclusion was in higher education or the secondary education system. Ultimately, community colleges became part of the higher education system (Drury, 2003). During the 1960s, grants were introduced to support community colleges, and by 1962, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges was established (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2012). In 1967, Senate Bill 669 was passed forming the Board of Governors and moving it from the Department of Education to form the State Chancellor’s Office. Community colleges grew rapidly, and times got better during the 1970s (Drury, 2003). In addition, community colleges became an integral part of the educational system. This was due to the influx of baby boomers as “more parents desired a postsecondary education for their children, and students sought draft deferment during the Vietnam War” (Kasper, 2003, p. 16).

By the 1980s, community colleges offered “specialized training, customized training, and highly vocational-oriented programs” (Drury, 2003, p. 5). Community colleges are committed to meeting local education needs, offering affordable academic programs and student activities. Also, community colleges allow public access to higher education so individuals can contribute to the nation’s workforce and build a competitive and sustainable economy (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2014; Pusser & Levin, 2009; PPIC, 2016).

### **Overview of California Community College System**

California passed legislation that authorized California secondary schools to offer courses and provided funding for independent regions for community colleges in 1907. California community colleges are the largest system in the nation with over 2.1 million students in 72 districts consisting of 114 colleges (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2018). California community colleges offer an Associate of Arts Degree (AAD), Associate of Sciences Degree, and short-term job training certificates in more than 175 fields, and more than 100,000 individuals are trained each year in industry-specific workforce skills (California Community Colleges, n.d.). California community colleges are California’s most economical system of education and the largest provider of workforce training in the state and nation (California Community Colleges, n.d.).

California community colleges educate 70% of the state’s nurses and train 80% of firefighters, including law enforcement personnel and emergency medical technicians (California Community Colleges, n.d.). Students who attend the University of California (UC) system account for 29%, and students who attend the California State University (CSU) account for 51%. The CCCCCO (2018) reported that fall 2018 enrollment for all

California community colleges was approximately 870,696 in which females comprised 53.6% and males comprised 45.12%. The report also showed that African Americans comprised only 6.1%, Hispanic 43.6%, and Whites 26.4% in which 43% of all students were first-generation. A first-generation college student (FGCS) is an individual having parents who did not attend college (Longmire-Avital & Miller-Dyce, 2015; Shumaker & Wood, 2016).

### **Challenges Faced by California Community Colleges**

Community colleges are challenged with meeting the needs of a diverse student population to service local communities and the diverse population of people in those communities. In doing so, community colleges offer a variety of courses and programs to meet the needs of students. Courses and programs include basic skills, transfer courses, and vocational programs. Recently, community colleges have faced challenges with implementing multiple state initiatives such as the Educational Planning Initiative and Starfish, Online Education Initiative, and the Student Success Initiative (CCCCO, Woodyard, & Larson, 2017). Additional challenges include the increase in dual enrollment and competition from for-profit institutions. Understanding the barriers community college students encounter is one of the major challenges institutions must address to increase completion rates.

Bailey's (2017) study argued that the variation in student preparation and educational expectations of students is insufficient within the community college system. A factor uncontrolled by students is a complexity of the college system. Additionally, Bailey explained that because of the confusion among class options, community college graduation rates are low, leading to students' not transferring to a 4-year institution.

Moreover, the article highlighted that students of color and low-income students encounter the most problems because they are underprepared, have a lack of knowledge, and are not financially stable, which harms their potential to succeed.

Institutions that do not provide a clear educational path for students entering college can result in an overwhelming experience for the students and can result in negative outcomes such as financial debt, course failure, lack of supportive services, and the most devastating impact of all, not receiving a college degree or certificate. Hope (2017) highlighted, “most students start college with a clear goal in mind, they expect to graduate” (p. 1). According to Bailey, Smith Jaggars, and Jenkins (2015), the majority of research regarding low student completion rates focuses on what the student did not do to achieve success and fails to acknowledge the negative impact the institution has created for the students by not providing a clear pathway. Furthermore, Van Noy, Trimble, Jenkins, Barnett, and Wachen (2016) explained that community college students are not offered rigorous courses, thus putting them at risk of encountering academic challenges and barriers to success.

### **Higher Education Outcomes of African American Males**

The National Center for Education Statistics ([NCES], 2018) followed a cohort of students beginning their postsecondary education in the 2011-2012 cohort year. The report showed that there were 14.1% of African American males who were enrolled at a 2-year college and 13.7% of African American males who were enrolled at a 4-year college. Regrettably, at the end of their 4-year cohort 52% of African American males who began their journey at a 2-year college were no longer enrolled and did not obtain a degree, and 30.6% of African American males enrolled at a 4-year college were no longer

enrolled and did not obtain a degree. In an additional report by the NCES (2017), there were only 22.6% of African American males who had a bachelor's degree compared to 37.8% of White males. Enrollment in higher education for African American males remains low. Multiple factors that limit their access such as student motivation, socioeconomic factors, and race issues continue to exist (Howard, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Rahman, 2018; Schneider & Saw, 2016). Lack of culturally relevant teaching practices, lack of enrollment and matriculation, and the way society perceives African American males are additional factors that limit their success (Howard, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Rahman, 2018; Schneider & Saw, 2016). Howard (2013) explained, [African Americans are] frequently labeled as problems, prone to violence, invoking fear in many, and deemed undesirable in certain circles, the view of Black males is diverse and extreme on many levels. Loathed in various environments, applauded in others, perhaps no other group of people are emulated yet despised simultaneously to the extent that Black men are today. (p. 55)

Similarly, Ladson-Billings (2011) stated,

We see African American males as “problems” that our society must find ways to eradicate. We regularly determine them to be the root cause of problems in school and society. We seem to hate their dress, their language and their effect. We hate that they challenge authority and command so much social power. While the society apparently loves them in narrow niches and specific slots—music, basketball, football, track—we seem less comfortable with them in places like the national Honor Society, the debate team, or the computer club. (p. 9)

Therefore, the higher educational outcomes of African American males are not just an individual issue but a societal issue as well. Thus, for African American males to experience higher educational success, there must be supports that eliminate their barriers, and institutions must be committed to providing them with academic, financial, and social supports (Tinto, 2012).

### **Community College and African American Males**

Community colleges often serve as an access point into higher education for African American male students. Wood and Williams (2013) explained that African American males are more likely to seek out postsecondary opportunities at community colleges. Wood's (2013) study found that African American males in community colleges tend to be older, have delayed enrollment, have greater odds of having dependents, and are more likely to be married and independent. In addition, the study showed that African Americans are less prepared for math and sciences and overall have lower degree expectations. Likewise, Flowers's (2006) study indicated African American males in community colleges have considerably lower levels of academic and social integration. According to Perrakis (2008) African Americans enroll in vast numbers at the community college level compared to their enrollment at the CSU or UC level. However, they are not graduating or transferring at the community college level. Regrettably, according to E. Bush and Bush (2010), "African American men throughout California's community college system . . . are the lowest performing subgroup when one considers: percentage of degrees earned, persistence rates, and average cumulative grade point average" (p. 40). Furthermore, they lag behind other ethnicities in entering the workforce. Most importantly, African American males who do access higher education

leave without reaching their anticipated goals (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014; Wood, 2014; Wood & Williams, 2013).

### **Community College African American Male Student Athletes**

Community colleges serve as an access point to a highly diverse student population not limited to race and ethnicity but also including diverse “age, job experience, academic ability, socio-economic status, and academic ambitions” (Horton, 2015, p. 288). Community colleges are also the source of many college athletes who aspire to continue playing after high school (Horton, 2015; Mendoza, Horton, & Mendez, 2012). Mendoza et al. (2012) suggested that “athletic programs often serve as the primary motivation for many individuals to pursue higher education, especially, perspective students from low-income and ethnic minority backgrounds” (p. 202). African American males, especially those from a low-income background and those who have academic deficits, enroll in community colleges at a higher rate than any other ethnicity.

### **Individual Characteristics of African American Male Student Athletes**

Many African American males begin their college career at 2-year institutions as student athletes (Richburg, 2014; Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014). The presence of African American male students in intercollegiate athletics is an opportunity to provide academic support leading to a college degree and employment. According to Bennett, Hodge, Graham, and Moore (2015), “Many black male student-athletes view the school as a place that will assist them in reaching the professional level in their respective sport, with much less connection to the institution in an educational sense” (p. xxiv). Because of the



disconnection, African American male student athletes may miss many of the opportunities that might otherwise be available.

Community colleges function as a point of entrance to a highly diverse student population (Horton, 2015; PPIC, 2016). Mendoza et al. (2012) stated, “Athletic programs serve as an entry point for many individuals pursuing higher education, especially, perspective students from low socio-economic and ethnic minority backgrounds” (p. 202). According to Horton (2015), students who participate in athletics can benefit financially and socially during their postsecondary experiences. According to I. D. Scott (2017), African American male student athletes depend on athletics as an opportunity to access higher education and for increased future earnings at a higher rate than other ethnicities (I. D. Scott, 2017). However, Horton (2015) explained that there is an achievement gap between African American males and other ethnicities and that their issues should be given attention. Therefore, when higher educational institutions provide African American male student athletes with the support necessary to succeed in the academics as well their chosen sport, they have the opportunity to experience more success than student nonathletes. Most importantly, it is imperative that these student athletes learn to succeed on and off the field, including in the classroom (Bennett et al., 2015; Byrd, 2017; Horton, 2015; Mendoza et al., 2012).

### **Support Systems for African American Males as Students and Athletes**

According to Storch and Ohlson (2009), “One of the most effective practices for the recruitment and retention of student athletes is a strong student support system” (p. 76). Support systems include academic support, financial assistance, and social support and engagement. Comprehensive programs that are designed for African American male

student athletes allow them to gain a sense of involvement in and belonging to (M. O. Brown, 2018), gain social and academic support (Kelly & Dixon, 2014), and receive comprehensive academic advising (Byrd, 2017). In addition, receiving mentorship opportunities helps provide psychosocial support, role modeling, and the learning of information (Burdex, 2015; Kelly & Dixon, 2014; Wheeler Anthony, 2016; W. C. White, 2016).

The relationships that African American male student athletes have with their institution, coaches, and staff are also factors that promote success. According to Hackett and Sheridan (2013) institutional commitment, social support, and athlete commitment were strong indicators of graduation completion among African American male student athletes. Worthy's (2017) study found that a strong relationship with their coach led to academic success and self-efficacy of African American male student athletes. Similarly, Wood and Newman (2017) found that positive interactions with African American faculty allowed African American males to feel safe and valued, which contributed to positive academic outcomes. Therefore, it is a benefit for African American male student athletes to have mentors throughout their collegiate journey to be supported and experience success.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Research has shown that African American males are less likely to graduate, more likely to drop out of college, less likely to enroll in a 4-year college after high school, more likely to experience barriers to higher education, and more likely to endure ongoing challenges in the American educational system (Bowman, Comer, & Johns, 2018; Calarco, 2014; Payton, 2012; Pruitt, Nicholas-Omoregbe, Bergdahl, Nomoregbe, &

Mbarika, 2019; Rothstein, 2014; A. D. Williams, Banerjee, M., Lozada-Smith, Lambouths, & Rowley, 2017). Likewise, literature has shown that African American undergraduate males are less prepared for the rigors of college-level work and are the largest number enrolled in remedial classes compared to their peers from other racial groups (J. Jackson & Kurlaender, 2014; PPIC, 2016; Richburg, 2014; Wilborn, 2013). Furthermore, research has proven that African American males endure racism, police brutality, oppression, and stress at a higher rate than any other ethnicity (Berry, 2019; Burch, 2014; Hanks, Solomon, & Weller, 2018; Lynch, 2017; Saleem et al., 2016). These traumatic events and other environmental factors continue to put African American males at-risk of experiencing homelessness, poverty, unemployment, incarceration, mental illness, health issues, and an array of unnecessary problems (Berry, 2019; Pruitt et al., 2019; Ross, Marchand, Cox, & Rowley, 2018; Saleem et al., 2016; Sharkey, 2013).

African American males are more likely to experience barriers and challenges while obtaining a collegiate degree than any other ethnic group including females (S. M. Harris, 2018; Jackson-Whitehead, 2018; Jay, 2018; J. T. Tate, 2016; Matthews-Whetstone & Scott, 2015). Research has consistently proven that African American males who are enrolled in the higher educational system endure academic unpreparedness, racism, racial insensitivity, stereotype threat, prejudice, low socioeconomic status, less academic support, and several other systematic issues that are out of their control (Branch, 2017; Jackson-Whitehead, 2018; Jenkins, 2013; PPIC, 2016; Wood, 2012). In addition to experiencing systematic issues, African American males drop out of college at a higher rate than other ethnicities because of financial issues, family responsibilities, psychological stress, lack of motivation, and a lack of support (S.

M. Harris, 2018; Matthews-Whetstone & Scott, 2015; Vasquez & Wood, 2014; Wood, 2012, 2014; Wood, Harrison, & Jones, 2016). In her forward, Bowman (2013) highlighted,

It is no secret that life is more challenging for African American children than for other American children. The continuing legacy of segregation and discrimination feeds poverty—of the body and the spirit—and casts a shadow over their lives. Many are mired in a level of poverty that carries significant physical and mental dangers. They are likely to live in segregated and poorly resourced communities, with poor schools, poor housing, poor employment opportunities and a hostile outside world. And even families who escape the stifling effects of poverty are handicapped by the inequalities they experience daily. (p. 2)

Hence, there needs to be much attention given to African American males who are both student athletes and student nonathletes to address this disproportionality within our society. There is extensive research that explores the factors of persistence for African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes, supports African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes, and documents the experiences of both groups at the community college and university levels. However, this is the first study to explore how the lived experiences of African American male student athletes differ from African American male student nonathletes at the community college level. Further research is needed to explore the experiences of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes to allow community college leaders to review programs offered to both of these

populations and develop supports that address their retention rates and that will meet their needs (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006). Rosenbaum et al. (2006) agree that when community college leaders focus on the deficiencies of marginalized students and are committed to improving their outcomes, more students within this population achieve success. In addition, encouraging institutions to implement identified support programs and motivating African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes to continue their education beyond the community college level is important to increase their success rates. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes to give them a place in the literature and to provide higher educational institutions with a guide to helping them succeed.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and differences between African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the lived experiences of African American male student athletes at California community colleges?
2. What are the lived experiences of African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges?
3. How do the lived experiences of African American male student athletes differ from African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges?

## **Significance of the Problem**

From the time that they are born, African American males are more likely to be raised in a single-parent (mother) household (Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012), are taught to “man up,” are the most impoverished (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019a), have identity issues (Jeffers, 2017), are stereotyped (Hotchkins, 2016), live in communities plagued with violence (Hardaway, Sterrett-Hong, Larkby, & Cornelius, 2016), experience police brutality at higher rates (Brooks et al., 2016), face harsher punishments (Alexander, 2012), and are expected to be strong without showing emotion. These circumstances along with many others prevent African American males from accessing higher education and succeeding in life. Therefore, it is necessary that African American males receive the proper supports so they can live quality lives.

During their K-12 years, African American males have the highest suspension and expulsion rates, more disciplinary referrals, more overrepresentation in special education, racial identity issues, the lowest standardized test scores, and a long list of other unwanted problems (Corprew & Cunningham, 2012; Greene, 2013; Jeffers, 2017; Jay, 2018; J. A. Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013; Whitaker, 2011). African American males are less likely to graduate high school than other ethnicities. In addition, they are more likely to enroll in community college and less likely to graduate and are less likely to transfer to a 4-year institution compared to their peers (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014; NCES, 2017, 2018; PPIC, 2016; J. T. Tate, 2016; Wilborn, 2013). Furthermore, they are more likely to drop out of college and are faced with the harsh reality of not obtaining a degree (Green, 2015; Jay, 2018; NCES, 2018; J. T. Tate, 2016; Wilborn, 2013).

Rahman (2018) noted that studying the lived experiences of African American males and their college experiences will help educators to understand their challenges and their plan to learn strategies that may promote college success. The result of this study may assist community colleges in creating programs that support African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes who focus on their holistic needs and goals. This study may also provide needed information and data to colleges' support structures regarding the strategies that have the greatest influence on supporting African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes. This study provides further information to educators of the experiences of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes, the need for targeted academic support, and the need for highly structured support services.

### **Definitions**

This section provides definitions of all terms that are relevant to the study.

**Academic support programs.** A range of support services, support systems, practices, and elements that assist students in clarifying their educational and career pathway, help choose a pathway, provide advising, and ensure learning is happening for the students to meet their goals (Glossary of Education Reform, 2014).

**African American.** Persons who are considered African American “are generally defined as people with ancestry from Sub-Saharan Africa who are residents or citizens of the United States” (M. Livingston, Pierce, & Gollop-Brown, 2013, p. 1).

**Associate of arts degree.** An associate of arts degree is a transferrable degree obtained at a community college. This degree is equal to 2 year's study of a bachelor's degree (Online Schools Center, 2019).

**Associate of science degree.** An associate of science degree is a transferrable degree obtained at a community college. This degree is equal to two year's study of a bachelor's degree (Online Schools Center, 2019).

**California Community College Athletic Association.** This association is An integral part of California's extensive community college system. As authorized by the State Legislature, the Education Code provides the California Community College Athletic Association the opportunity and authority to establish the rules and regulations to administer the athletic activities of the nearly 25,000 men and women student athletes in the state. (California Community College Athletic Association, n.d.-b, p. 1).

**California community colleges.** California community colleges are higher educational institutions that offer associate degrees (2-year) with an option to transfer to a 4-year college. They have the most enrolled students throughout the nation (CCCCO et al., 2017).

**California State University.** The California State University system is a higher educational institution that offers undergraduate and graduate degrees. It is known as a 4-year institution, has 23 campuses across the state, and is the largest university system in the nation (PPIC, 2016).

**College student athlete.** Is referred to as "a student who is a member of an intercollegiate athletic team at a community college or a four-year college" (Byrd, 2017, p. 14).



**First-generation college student.** Is referred to as a student whose parents did not attend college (Mehta, Newbold, & O'Rourke, 2011).

**University of California.** The University of California system has nine campuses across the state, offers undergraduate and graduate degrees, and is known as a 4-year college (PPIC, 2016).

### **Delimitations**

The delimitations of this study are as follows:

1. Delimited to African Americans.
2. Delimited to males.
3. Delimited to students who are currently enrolled at the community college level.
4. Delimited to athletes and nonathletes who attend the College of the Sequoias, Fresno City College, and Merced Community College.
5. Delimited to student athletes who play football.

### **Organization of the Study**

The purpose of Chapter I was to explore the lived experiences of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes at the community college level and to describe the factors that assist them while attending college. This dissertation is composed of five chapters. Chapter I included the introduction of the study, background of the problem, significance of the problem, terms, and delimitations. Chapter II provides a review of the literature of community college supports, outcomes of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes, and includes a theoretical framework for assisting African American males at the community college level. Chapter III consists of this study's

methodology, research design, population, sampling frame, data collection methods, and data analysis. Chapter IV contains the findings that were collected from the participants' responses. Chapter IV provides the conclusion, recommendations, and implications for further research.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and differences between African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges. Studies continue to show that African American males experience negative outcomes such as poverty, racism, police brutality, incarceration, unemployment, and educational deficits at higher rates than other ethnicities (Alexander, 2012; Greene, 2013; Jay, 2018; Jeffers, 2017; B. J. Johnson, Ray, & Lasker, 2014). Therefore, this literature review explores the history of California community colleges, highlights the unfavorable outcomes of African American males, examines the educational outcomes of African Americans, and investigates research on African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes at the California community college level and provides information about academic, social, and emotional supports and engagement services that assist them in completing a degree or qualifying to transfer to a 4-year institution.

### **History of California Community Colleges**

#### **Origin of Community Colleges**

California community colleges' origin began at the K-12 school districts. Historians identified Joliet Junior College in Joliet High School, near Chicago, as the first public community college (Galizio, 2019). Advocates Alexis F. Lange, Dean of the School of Education at the University of California at Berkeley and David Starr Jordan, President of Stanford University, had ambition to increase the status of their respective institutions and believed junior colleges would fulfill the need to offer courses to

freshman and sophomores so the respective universities could focus on upper division coursework, research, and graduate programs (Galizio, 2019).

In early 1892, the University of California began to advocate that the first 2 years of university belonged to secondary education, and by 1900, Stanford University, the University of Southern California, and the University of California at Berkeley dominated higher education institutions in the state (Galizio, 2019). Access to the universities became difficult, resulting in strategic partnership with the governor, the president of the University of California, the principals of the state normal schools, and the director of the department of education at Berkeley to position Lang as chairman of the board (Galizio, 2019). As chairman of the board, Lang collaborated with Senator Anthony Caminetti to develop the Upward Extension Law, allowing high schools to offer postgraduate classes (Gallagher, 1994). The Upward Extension Law was the first state law in the country authorizing the formation of junior colleges. The law read as follows:

The board of trustees of any city, district, union, joint union, or county high school may prescribe postgraduate courses of study for the graduates of such high school, or other high schools, which courses of study shall approximate the studies prescribed in the first two years of university courses. The board of trustees of any city, district, union, joint union, or county high school “wherein the postgraduate courses are taught may charge tuition for pupils living without the boundaries of the district wherein such courses are taught.” (Galizio, 2019, p. 5)

In 1990, the first California junior college established under the Upward Extension Law was Fresno High School, later named Fresno City College (Boggs &

Cater, 1994; Galizio, 2019). With high schools offering 2 years of coursework, the approach allowed students to stay close to home (Galizio, 2019; Gallagher, 1994). By the fall of 1910, Fresno High School offered classes in English, mathematics, history, Latin, economics, modern language, and technical courses (Bogue, 1950). The courses prepared students for a career in agriculture or local industry. Five years after the first college term, student enrollment at Fresno High School was 115. Attendance was at no cost to residents, and nonresidents paid a \$4.00-a-month tuition (Witt, Wattenbarger, Gollattscheck, & Supinger, 1994). Soon after, junior colleges opened in Hollywood, Los Angeles, Bakersfield, Fullerton, and Long Beach California. California had 16 junior colleges by the fall of 1917. According to Witt et al. (1994), “California had created the most comprehensive community college system in the nation” (p. 38).

### **Purpose of Community Colleges**

Drury (2003) detailed how the Morrill Act of 1862 (the Land Grant Act), allowed for the inclusion of higher education for individuals who had previously been denied access or were unable to take advantage of higher education opportunities. Community colleges became an integral part of the educational system. In 1907, legislation authorized junior colleges in California public schools with Fresno High School, now Fresno City College, as the first community college to offer college courses for students aspiring to obtain a baccalaureate degree (C. J. Smith, 2018). Additionally, Junior College districts were permitted to be autonomous from public school districts in 1921 therefore resulting in a considerable number of colleges established by the 1950s in response to the growing demand for higher education in California. According to C. J. Smith (2018), community colleges play a significant role in the political recognition of

how the contributions the community colleges make to the economic and social health of the communities served.

The purpose of California community college system is stated in its mission, which is to ensure that all students obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to be competitive in the 21st century (C. J. Smith, 2018). According to C. J. Smith (2018), California community colleges fulfill three values in their missions, which are access, equity, and success. California community colleges “provide access to higher education for all—everyone who can benefit from education may attend a community college” (C. J. Smith, 2018, p. 3). C. J. Smith (2018) outlined the California Education Code regarding the mission and functions of California community colleges, which are the following:

As a primary mission, academic and vocational instruction at the lower division level for younger and older students. As a primary mission, advance California’s economic growth and global competitiveness through education, training and services that contribute to workforce improvement. As essential and important functions, remedial instruction, and in conjunction with school districts, adult noncredit education, English as a Second Language, and support services that help students succeed. As authorized functions, community service courses and programs and institutional research concerning student learning and retention.

(p. 3)

### **Structure of Community Colleges**

California community colleges are part of a three-tiered, public postsecondary educational system that includes the California community colleges, California State

Universities, and University of California (C. J. Smith, 2018; L. K. Wells, 1990).

California's three-tier system was known as "an equal-opportunity gateway to all higher education" (Sweetland Edwards, 2013, p. 34). Assembly Bill (AB) 1725, the Community College Reform Bill, ultimately created the California community college structure.

Assembly Bill 1725 was signed in 1988, and its focus was to define the role of community colleges as "postsecondary institutions committed to transferring students, offering remedial courses, and providing remedial training" (T. Livingston, 1998, p. 1).

According to L. K. Wells (1990), structure is determined by funding, scheduling, and curriculum. The author explained that funding goes through a cycle of cuts before it is actually allocated. The process in which funding is allocated impacts scheduling decisions; therefore, it also impacts classroom usage. Curriculum is another impact of structure. Curriculum is a subcommittee of the Academic Senate and decisions made by the Academic Senate and curriculum committee are largely tied to the education code and the Master Plan for High Education (L. K. Wells, 1990). Although departments have autonomy when it comes to some decisions, the same decisions have an impact on the internal workings of a college. With the various views of structure from different constituent groups, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) is the overarching body of the California community college system. The Chancellor's office is led by Chancellor Eloy Oakley. Eloy Oakley has served as the California Community Colleges Chancellor since December 2016. The Chancellor's office is led by Vice Chancellors who oversee nine divisions, and the divisions of his office share a common goal of providing students supports to achieve success (CCCCO, n.d.).

## **The Experiences of African American Males**

African American males experience more unfavorable outcomes such as poverty, racism, police brutality, trauma, unemployment, and imprisonment at higher rates than other ethnicities (Alexander, 2012; L. V. Bush & Bush, 2013; Greene, 2013; Jay, 2018; Jeffers, 2017; B. J. Johnson et al., 2014). Research has shown that African American males grow up in low-income and single-parent households, which results in insufficient supports, educational deficits, and barriers to success (Burdex, 2015; de Brey et al., 2019; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). These economic and societal obstacles continue to be disadvantages that prevent African American males from experiencing a quality life.

### **Poverty**

Konigsburg (2017) defined a living wage as the ability to “support oneself and one’s family without government assistance” (p. 1). In the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018) report, African American families accounted for 28.9% of those who received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) compared to 27.2% of White families and 1.9% of Asian American families. The U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.) reported that African Americans represent only 13.4% of the U.S. population, which means that they disproportionately rely more on government assistance. Schott (2019) stated, “Fifty-three percent of the nation’s Black population lives in states where benefits are at or below \$356 a month, which is 20 percent of the poverty line; only 39 percent of white people live in these same states” (p. 1). In addition, the author explained that African American children do not receive the same opportunities as White children, and they live in the most underperforming states. Having an income of \$356 a month



presents challenges for many African American families in America. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition's (2012) report, 93% of African Americans lived in Project-Based Section 8 housing and had incomes that were less than \$20,000 yearly. Additionally, the report showed that African American families represent 45% of all families on subsidized housing, are more likely to live in impoverished neighborhoods, and are more likely to live in female head-of-household families. These statistics create stress within African American homes and do not allow them to afford necessities for living.

Patten and Krogstad (2015) reported that the rate of poverty for African Americans continues to increase while poverty for other ethnicities decreases. The Annie E. Casey Foundation [AECF] (2019) report showed that 32% of African American children live in poverty. Winship, Reeves, and Guyot (2018) explained that African American children (males in particular) are more likely to be born in and inherit poverty. Poverty negatively affects the overall health and well-being of individuals because they are not able to adequately care for themselves and their families. Matthew, Rodrigue, and Reeves's (2016) study found that African American families who live in impoverished communities have more physical and mental stress and are burdened with the harsh reality of not being able to afford to care for their basic needs. As a result, African American parents have to work increased hours to provide for their households, which results in spending less time with their children. Chetty, Hendren, Jones, and Porter's (2018) study revealed that African American families who live in poverty struggle to provide them with affection and attention due to having to work increased hours just to make ends meet. This poverty crisis that African Americans experience puts

them at-risk for many economical deficits such as home ownership, creating generational wealth, and accumulating assets to pass on to their children. The poverty crisis of African Americans can be attributed in part to racism, discrimination, and oppression. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (2019) stated, “Racial disparities in income are the result of historical and current discrimination, and differences in educational attainment and wage and employment rates, among other factors” (p. 10).

### **Racism**

Racism can be traced back to the days of slavery when Africans were brutally shipped to the United States and sold into free and inhumane labor (Dennis & Dennis, 2008; Feagin, 2013; Kendi, 2016; Trounstine, 2018; Wilder, 2013). Feagin (2013) stated,

Today, as in the past, systemic racism encompasses a broad range of white-racist dimensions: the racist ideology, attitudes, emotions, habits, actions, and institutions of whites in this society. Thus systemic racism is far more than a matter of racial prejudice and individual bigotry. It is a material, social, and ideological reality that is well-embedded in major U.S. institutions. (p. 2)

African American males have experienced racism in institutions such as K-12 and higher educational systems, the criminal justice system, government organizations, the health care system, and banking systems (J. A. Allen, 2019; Banks, 2017; Isom, 2016; L. Jackson, Shestov, & Saadatmand, 2017; McKenzie, 2014; W. A. Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014b) reported that 48% of African American children were suspended but made up only 18% of enrollment. In addition, the report revealed that African American boys were suspended at a 3:4 ratio. In Calarco’s (2014) study, African American males who

experienced racism in the public educational system had poorer academic outcomes than those who did not experience racism. In addition, the study revealed that racism prevents African American males from obtaining degrees and being successful in adulthood. Research has shown that African American boys have been pushed into the school-to-prison pipeline, which has led to negative outcomes such as unemployment, mental health issues, teen pregnancies, homelessness, and health issues (Q. Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Carter, 2018; J. L. Martin & Beese, 2017; Peak, 2015; T. R. Porter, 2015). Alexander (2012) explained that because of racism, racial profiling, and racist policies, African American males experience mass incarceration at higher rates than their counterparts. The author indicated that mass incarceration is the new racism for African American males. Additionally, the author highlighted that African American males receive harsher sentences for the same crimes committed among White men. Involvement in the criminal system prevents African American males from gaining employment, accessing government assistance, enrolling in higher education, and parenting their children (Coates, 2015; Graham & Harris, 2013; Guo, 2016; Liberman & Fountaine, 2015; Young, Farrell, & Taxman, 2013). Being an African American male in America includes being a constant target for inequalities, stereotypes, exclusionary practices, discrimination, and attacks simply because of the color of their skin (Banks, 2017; Brooms & Perry, 2016; Hereford, 2012; Lindsay, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2016; Rollins, 2017; Tallent, 2017). Consequently, Brooms and Perry (2016) stated, “Representations of Black males, currently and in the recent past, are manifested as stereotypes that serve as the basis for worldviews and policy regimes that disproportionately disadvantage and truncate their life chances” (p. 169).

## **Police Brutality**

The literature has shown that African American males are more likely to grow up in impoverished neighborhoods (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2019; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018; Patten & Krogstad, 2015; Schott, 2019; Winship et al., 2018). These neighborhoods have a lack of resources, a display of unhealthy behaviors, and are more prone to have higher rates of violence than affluent communities (DeLuca, Wood, & Rosenblatt, 2019; Nehl, Elifson, DePadilla, & Sterk, 2016; Stansfield & Doherty, 2019; A. Thomas, Caldwell, Assari, Jagers, & Flay, 2016; Vogel & Van Ham, 2018; Yu & Hope House Men and Alumni, 2018). Therefore, policing in such areas increases, and African American males are more likely to be stopped and targeted by the police than their counterparts (Adedoyin et al., 2019; Brooms & Perry, 2016; J. K. Johnson, 2018; Moore et al., 2016; Pew Center Research, 2016). Adedoyin et al.'s (2019) study revealed that African American males experience higher rates of stereotypes that result in their being stopped by the police. In addition, the authors explained that because of these stereotypes, police say that they fear for their lives and resort to violence against African American males as a result. Similarly, Smiley and Fakunle (2016) reported that African American males are dehumanized in social media, causing them to be negatively labeled in society. The authors explained that stereotypes have allowed police to racially profile African American men and label them as being potential suspects. Consequently, these actions have led to the number of mass killings of innocent unarmed African American males. In Desmond, Papachristos, and Kirk's (2016) study, the researchers concluded that African American males were disproportionately targeted by the police, which resulted in violence attacks. As a result,

there was a significantly large number of reductions in 911 calls within an African American community in Milwaukee for fear of more violence toward African American males at the hands of police officers. According to L. Evans and Feagin (2015), African American males have endured excessive force, negative treatment, and unjustifiable deaths at the hands of the police for centuries. The authors indicated that these outcomes occur because of racism against African American males. The study concluded by pointing out that these events lead to social, emotional, and psychological affects within the African American community. Likewise, J. K. Johnson's (2018) study showed that African American males are characterized as violent and aggressive. The author explained that these labels have resulted in many mass killings of unarmed African American males at the hands of police. In addition, the pasts of these men are brought to light, which justifies their deaths. The author concluded by outlining that these unjust deaths have plagued African American men with emotional and psychological stress. Events such as police brutality, racism, parental incarceration, community violence, removal from their homes, and other adversities are all related to traumatic events endured among African American males (Crouch, Probst, Radcliff, Bennett, & McKinney, 2019; Phipps & Thorne, 2019; Kokaliari, Roy, & Taylor, 2019; S. A. Martin, Harris, & Jack, 2015; A. Thomas et al., 2016; Yu & Hope House Men and Alumni, 2018).

### **Trauma**

Trauma is experienced as early as conception and includes exposure to traumatic events such as abuse, parental incarceration, divorce, death and loss, mental illness of a caregiver, parental separation, domestic violence, and parental substance abuse (Felitti et

al., 1998). In addition, the American Psychiatric Association (1994) explained that trauma occurs when individuals have exposure to extreme stressors that poses a threat to themselves or their loved ones. Exposure to trauma causes psychological and cognitive insufficiencies, which results in health issues, behavioral problems, and social ills that negatively affect a person's well-being (Champine, Matlin, Strambler, & Tebes, 2018; Coulter, 2014; Haller & Chassin, 2012; Halloran, 2019; Schimmenti, 2018). African American children who are exposed to traumatic events have developed psychologically related issues, which have contributed to the national health crisis, especially of African American men (Garo, Allen-Handy, & Lewis, 2018; Halloran, 2019; S. A. Martin et al., 2015; Staggers-Hakim, 2016; Yu & Hope House Men and Alumni, 2018). Crouch et al.'s (2019) study showed that African American children were more likely to experience higher rates of trauma than their counterparts. In addition, African American children had the highest rate of parental separation, lived in poverty, and were more economically disadvantaged. Cross, Crow, Powers, and Bradley's (2015) study revealed that low-income African American males were more likely to develop PTSD as a result of childhood trauma than African American women. Although there were twice as many African American women in the study as African American males, the males reported having higher alcohol use and substance abuse issues. Consequently, Janusek, Tell, Gaylord-Harden, and Mathews (2017) explained,

African American men (AAM) who are exposed to trauma and adversity during their early life are at greater risk for poor health over their lifespan. Exposure to adversity during critical developmental windows may embed an epigenetic signature that alters expression of genes that regulate stress response systems,

including those genes that regulate the inflammatory response to stress. Such an epigenetic signature may increase risk for diseases exacerbated by inflammation, and may contribute to health disparity. (p. 126)

Societal and economic disadvantages such as poverty, racism, police brutality, and trauma continue to plague African American males, which prevents them from experiencing a life of well-being and happiness (Arrington, 2015; L. V. Bush & Bush, 2013; Garo et al., 2018; Murphy, Gangwisch, Matsunaga, & Ottman, 2018; Onwuachi-Willig, 2016; Stagers-Hakim, 2016). Therefore, African American males are faced with the harsh reality of living a life full of adversity, suffering, obstacles, roadblocks, and other unwanted issues. The unjust treatment of African American males is a national crisis that needs to be addressed through national policies that include equity throughout all institutions and organizations.

### **Educational Outcomes of African Americans**

Although educational reform has improved and there have been several programs created to address the academic needs of students, African Americans still lag behind their peers in regard to state testing, graduation, and completion rates (Hunter, 2015; Musu-Gillette et al., 2016, 2017). Studies continue to report that an educational gap exists between African American males and other ethnic groups (Gardner, Rizzi, & Council, 2014; Hill & Roberts, 2019; Kuhfeld, Gershoff, & Paschall, 2018; Leefatt, 2015; Lenard & Peña, 2018; Potter & Morris, 2017; Ransaw & Majors, 2016). While there is a gap in the literature that provides educational outcomes solely for African American males, studies show that educational achievement gaps not only exist in the K-12 system but also in the higher educational system for African Americans, which continues to put

them at an economic disadvantage compared to other ethnicities (Howard, 2015; McBride, 2017; Ransaw & Majors, 2016, 2017; Shapiro et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014b).

### **High School**

According to NCES (2019a), graduation rates for African Americans have increased over the years; however, they still lag behind other ethnicities. The report showed that only 78% of African Americans graduated from high school compared to 89% of White students in the 2016-2017 academic school year. The report revealed that high school completion gaps between Hispanics and Whites have decreased while high school completion gaps between African Americans and Whites have increased. In addition, African American students ages 16-24 had 6.5% dropout rate (not enrolled in school and nonhigh school diploma) compared to 4.3% of White students ages 16-24. Likewise, in a report by McFarland, Cui, Rathbun, and Holmes, (2018) only 76% of African American students graduated from high school within 4 years compared to 88% of White students in the 2015-2016 academic school year. The report also showed that African American students are less likely to complete high school, more likely to drop out of high school, and less likely to attend college compared to White students. Moreover, in Musu-Gillette et al.'s (2016) study, African American high school students were twice as likely to have unfavorable outcomes in every category compared to White high school students. The study showed that 39% of African American children lived in poverty (10% for Whites), only 6% earned calculus credit (18% for Whites), and 48.3% of African American males were suspended (21.4% for White males). Furthermore, Kuhfeld et al.'s (2018) study found that poor White boys performed better than poor



African American boys. In addition, the study showed that as African American boys grew older, they continued to have gaps in knowledge compared to White boys. The educational outcomes of African American males continue to show that they are falling behind in grades K-12; thus, attention needs to be given to the development of culturally appropriate programs, services, interventions, and supports to yield successful outcomes (Mitchell, Bush, & Bush, 2002).

### **Community College**

The unfavorable high school educational outcomes of African American males follow them throughout college as well. Approximately 6% of California community college students are African American males (CCCCO, 2018). The U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.) reported 7% of African American males obtain an associate's degree whereas 10% of African American women receive an associate's degree. Research has shown that African American males are less likely to be prepared for college, especially those who come from low-income households (ACT, 2015; Bailey et al., 2015; The Century Foundation, 2013; Ma & Baum, 2016; Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Bryant and Center for Law and Social Policy (2015) stated, "Far too frequently, African American students are thought to be unfit for college and directed to low-wage work or trade schools following high school completion" (p. 2). Levin, Cox, Haberler, and Cerven's (2011) study indicated that low-income populations such as African American, Latino, and undocumented students lag behind their White and Asian counterparts in completing, entering, and persisting in community college. Likewise, the Public Policy Institute of California [PPIC] (2016) reported that African American males are less likely to obtain an associate's degree than White males. Musu-Gillette et al.'s (2016) study showed that

only 11% of African Americans graduated from a 2-year college within 3 years. In Musu-Gillette et al.'s (2017) study, only 32% of African American males were enrolled in college compared to 68% of African American females. Additionally, 22% of African Americans had not completed high school compared to 13% of Whites. The NCES (2019b) report showed that there were 1,232,396 African Americans enrolled at a 2-year college compared to 4,128,272 White students in the 2017-2018 academic year. The report also showed that only 23.4% of African American males received an associate's degree within 2 years compared to 34.5% of White males in their 2014 cohort year.

African American student's educational outcomes are less favorable than other ethnicities both nationally and statewide (Cal-Pass Plus, 2019a). The Cal-Pass Plus (2019a) database showed that 123,607 first year African American students were enrolled at community colleges (compared to 537,749 Whites), had a success rate of 62% success rate (78% for Whites), only 16% completed their English and math transfer courses (compared to 30% for Whites), and 64% of were retained from the Fall to Spring semester (compared to 70% of Whites). In addition, only 1,446 received an associate's degree compared to 11,010 Whites in the 2017-2018 school year. The Postsecondary National Policy Institute ([PNPI], 2017) reported that only 33% of African Americans obtained a 2-year degree in 2015 compared 47% of Whites. The report showed that African American females enroll in college at a higher percentage than African American males. Also, 30% of African American students were top academic performers enrolled at community college upon graduating from high school.

African Americans also have less favorable outcomes within the different regions of California. The data outlined in Table 1 include the community college education

outcomes for students who are enrolled in the San Joaquin Valley. This region consists of cities from Modesto to Bakersfield, in which the participants of this study attend college. Success is defined as earning an associate’s degree, transferring to a 4-year university, or completing 60 units with a (grade point average) GPA of a 2.0 or over and transferring to a 4-year institution within 6 years (Educational Results Partnership, 2019).

Table 1

*San Joaquin Valley Young Men of Color Community College Data*

Race	Total student enrollment	Success	Remedial progress rate—English	Remedial progress rate—Math	Persistence rate
African American	5%	31%	26%	18%	69%
Asian	7%	47%	46%	41%	80%
Hispanic	56%	35%	32%	28%	73%
White	25%	45%	38%	33%	74%

*Note.* Adapted from “Young Men of Color: Community College,” by Educational Results Partnership, 2019 (<https://dataportal.edresults.org/YMOC/CommunityCollege>).

The statewide and regional specific results indicate that African American students are less likely to persist and experience success while in community college. McBride (2017) stated, “The moment men of color are admitted to a college or university, their experience should look different from that of the majority of students, as we know . . . capable of excelling when given the tools to do so” (p. 1). Therefore, African American males need institutional support to achieve higher educational success.

## **Four-Year Universities**

According to the ACT (2016) report, African Americans are less prepared for college than other ethnicities. The report showed that only 6% of African American students met college benchmarks compared to 28% of all other students. In addition, African American students are less likely to meet core and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) benchmarks. The findings showed that 85% of African Americans aspire to obtain a postsecondary degree; however, statistics show different outcomes. Although African American males receive collegiate degrees, they still lag behind their peers in degree attainment (de Brey et al., 2019; Musu-Gillette et al., 2017; NCES, 2019b; PNPI, 2017). The U.S Census Bureau (n.d.) report showed that only 12% of African American males and 14% of African American females obtained a bachelor's degree. Attainment drops within this population for advanced degrees with 6% of African American males and 9% of African American females holding a master's, doctorate, or professional degree. The NCES (2019b) report showed that there were 2,077,437 African American students enrolled at a 4-year university compared to 8,808,307 White students in the 2017-2018 academic year. In addition, only 195,732 African American males obtained a degree compared to 1,142,861 White males. Consequently, only 34.1% of African American males completed a bachelor's degree within 4 years compared to 61.4% of White males. Similarly, in Musu-Gillette et al.'s (2016) study, they reported that only 19% of African Americans earned a degree compared to 33% of Whites. The study also showed that 25% of African Americans had not obtained a high school degree compared to 14% of Whites. Consequently, 29% of African Americans ages 20 to 24 were not enrolled in school or working compared to

15% of Whites. Moreover, de Brey et al.'s (2019) study showed that only 38% of African American males were enrolled in an undergraduate program compared to 62% of African American females. Additionally, only 30% of African American males were enrolled in graduate school compared to 70% of African American females. The report also showed that only 40% of African American students obtained a degree compared to 60% of White students. Furthermore, Cal-Pass Plus (2019c) reported that in the 2017-2018 academic year, African Americans who were enrolled in their first year at a 4-year institution had a GPA of 2.67 compared to 3.09 for Whites. In addition, African Americans persisted at a 91% rate compared to 92% for Whites, 77% of African Americans passed their courses with a C or better compared to 86% for Whites, and African Americans completed an average of 33.28 units compared to 36.83 units compared to Whites. Consequently, the PNPI (2017) reported,

Less than half of African American students graduate within six years and 43% of African American Pell Grant recipients drop out before earning a degree. In 2015, 21% of the African American population aged 25 to 29 held a bachelor's degree, compared to 43% of the white population for the same age range. (p. 1)

These statistics show that African Americans are less likely to obtain high school diplomas, be prepared for college, and receive a college degree. Harper (2012) stated, "Postsecondary educators, leaders, and policymakers must do more of what works to enroll, retain, educate, and graduate Black male students" (p. 19). Therefore, for African Americans to experience higher educational success, institutions must create opportunities for achievement among this population to offset the challenges and barriers that they experience while in college.

## **College Student Athletes**

According to Byrd (2017), a college student athlete is “a student who is a member of an intercollegiate athletic team at a community college or a four-year college” (p. 14). For an individual to be a student athlete, he must play a sport, register with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and meet academic eligibility requirements (NCAA, 2019). College student athletes have a multifaceted experience due to the nature of being a student and an athlete. Watt and Moore (2001) stated, “The college student athlete faces all the challenges experienced by nonathletes (social adjustment, career exploration, intellectual growth)” (p. 7). In addition, student athletes have a desire to play on a professional organization, which is an added stress to performing well on and off the field (Pflum, Nadler, & Miller, 2017). This desire comes with “obligations to the coach, the team, and the rules and regulations of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)” (Watt & Moore, 2001, p. 7).

In addition to remaining academic eligible, student athletes have to attend practice, compete against their teammates for starting positions, attend games, participate in team events, interact with fans, take care of their bodies to prevent injuries, heal from injuries, and stay out of trouble (Clontz, 2019; Freeman, 2009; Pflum et al., 2017; Rodriguez, 2019; Scarcella, 2016). Moreover, college student athletes have to balance the dual role of being both athlete and student; some students experience success, and some do not.

### **Challenges**

Calhoun’s (2012) study examined the impact of academic clustering among college student athletes. The results showed that the participants were put into “easy”

majors like communications, sociology, and communication to fit with their schedules; however, they were dissatisfied with their major. The participants indicated that they were disinterested in academic achievement because of their major. The findings revealed that the participants lacked academic support, experienced isolation from other students, and were unable to reach their full academic potential. The authors recommended that institutions provide all college student athletes with meaningful experiences. Southall, Eckard, Nagel, and Randall's (2015) study explored the graduation rates of athletes who play at profit higher educational institutions. The authors found that athletes who play at these schools have challenges of not only competing at a high level but also winning. The participants felt pressured to perform well, which resulted in psychological stress. The findings showed that African American males who were athletes graduated at lower rates than Males who were not athletes. The authors suggested that the NCAA model for college athletes be revised so that all student athletes can experience success. Andronikos, Westbury, and Martindale's (2019) study found that factors such having to work and poor communication put student athletes at a significantly higher risk of dropping out of college. The participants indicated they dropped out of college because of the lack of proper support and mentoring. The results indicated that the participants were overwhelmed and felt too much pressure of being a student athlete. The authors suggested that student athletes be provided with early intervention and prevention supports during their first years of college. A. Brown's (2019) study explored demographics that led to academic success of college student athletes. Results showed that female athletes performed better than males and experienced academic success at a higher rate. The findings indicated that African

American males who were wrestlers or football players had the least success compared to the other athletes. Astonishingly, the findings showed that the time spent on academics was not a predictor of academic success among the participants. The author suggested that colleges allow athletes to have a day of rest and not schedule multiple games throughout the week. Although student athletes experience challenges with bearing the responsibility of operating in a dual role, they also experience successful outcomes through academic, social, and emotional supports.

### **Successes**

Kamusoko and Pemberton (2011) examined the wellbeing of college student athletes. The majority of the participants were in track and field and football; over 90% maintained a GPA of 2.5 and over, and over 90% indicated that their desire was to graduate. The authors found that although the students experienced some challenges, they were able to overcome them with academic, social, and emotional support. The results showed that the participants were satisfied with the academic preparation and academic advising they received. Most importantly, the services and supports that the participants accessed resulted in successful academic outcomes. In Matthews's (2017) study of college student athletes, social experiences played a significant factor in their success. Although the participants reported challenges such as needing to work, their relationships with peers was a strong indicator of persistence. The findings revealed that academic advising, an interactive social environment, and attending social events were predictors of successful outcomes among the participants. The authors suggested that student involvement such as participating in extracurricular activities allows students to experience more success than those who do not participate in extracurricular activities.



Likewise, Hackett's (2011) study found that social supports such as relationships with coaches and participation in college campus activities were motivating factors for African American male student athletes. The participants indicated that they were committed to achieving success. The findings revealed that student athletes are more successful when they participate in activities and when they receive meaningful mentoring from their coaches. Duron's (2017) study investigated the experiences of community college coaches' experiences with first-generation college athletes. The participants indicated that first-time student athletes require life-skill development and mentoring to achieve their collegiate goals. The results indicated that the players were successful because of services that were provided to them. The authors suggested that coaches are provided with adequate training to support their athletes and that students are provided with proper services to persist to graduation. Although student athletes experience more pressure than student nonathletes, they are able to persist with proper supports. Renfro (2012) noted that "participation in college sports enhances the educational experience of student-athletes and that such educational value is the only rational reason for the continued support of intercollegiate athletes in higher education" (p. 33). Moreover, research has shown that college student athletes graduate at higher rates than student nonathletes because of their institutional involvement, commitment to graduate, and desire to become professional sports players (Emmert, 2014; NCAA, 2019; Renfro, 2012; Robinson, 2017; Yeung, 2015).

### **Academic Athletic Eligibility**

For students to participate in collegiate sports, they must meet specific academic requirements during high school (Adams, 2018; Gard, 2015; Love, 2019; NCAA, 2019;

Padilla, 2015; Rost, 2015; Singleton, 2013). These academic requirements vary for each student athlete as the requirements are more challenging depending on the level of competitiveness the individual desires to perform within. The NCAA comprises three different divisions that are categorized from most competitive and rigorous to less competitive and rigorous. Student athletes must maintain academic eligibility in both high school and college to remain in their sport.

### **High School Eligibility**

According to the NCAA (2019), Division I is considered the most competitive division among the sports, which includes football teams who attend college bowl games and basketball teams who play in national tournaments. This division requires students to maintain high academic GPAs because of the competitiveness and the offering of scholarships. Therefore, for individuals to qualify, they must meet the following academic requirements that are listed in Table 2.

In addition to having to complete these required courses, students must complete 10 of their core courses within a seven-semester period, maintain a 3.0 GPA, score at least a 75 on the ACT, or score at least a 980 on the SAT, and graduate from high school (NCAA, 2019). If individuals do not meet these qualifications, they have to redshirt or play in a different division.

Individuals who have a desire to play in Division II sports have a less rigorous academic standard to achieve. According to NCAA (2019), Division II is competitive; however, it is not as competitive as Division I. Institutions at this level offer their student athletes partial scholarships and are not able to afford to dedicate large sums of monies to their athletic programs. Students who play in this division upon completing high school

Table 2

*Division I High School Student Athlete Requirements to Play College Sports*

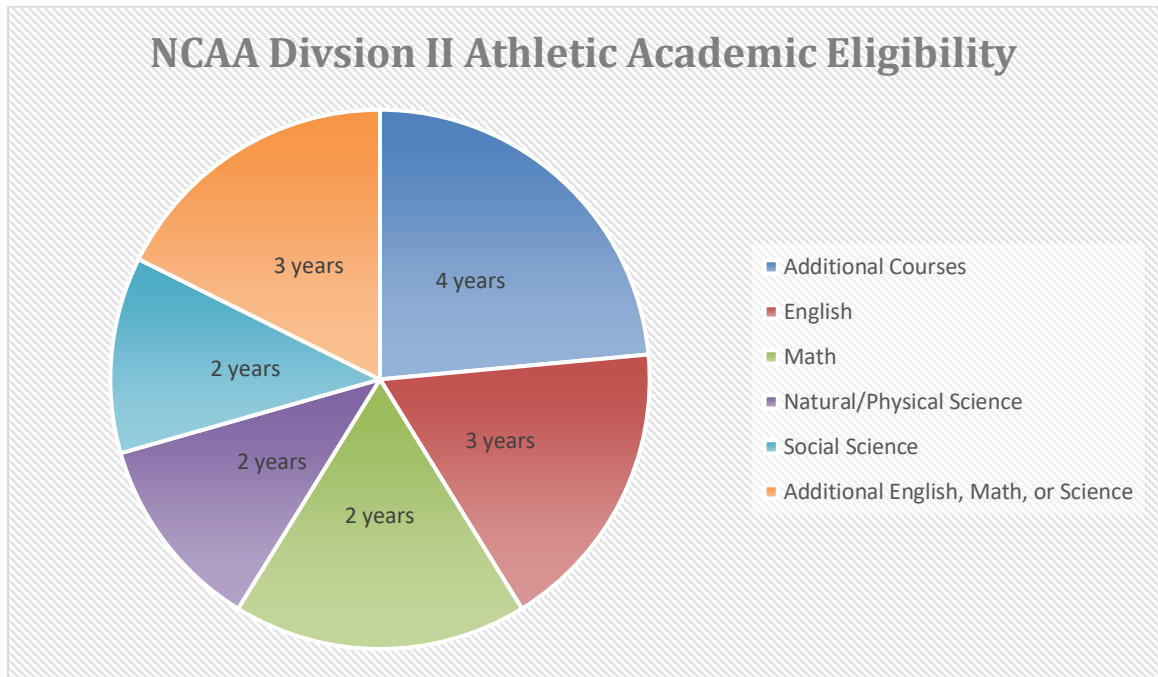
High school year	Classes required
Freshman	(1) English (1) Math (1) Science (1) Social Science and/or additional
Sophomore	(1) English (1) Math (1) Science (1) Social Science and/or additional
Junior	(1) English (1) Math (1) Science (1) Social Science and/or additional
Senior	(1) English (1) Math (1) Science (1) Social Science and/or additional
Throughout freshman-senior years	4 years of additional courses, which include a foreign language, philosophy, or comparative religion

*Note.* Adapted from “2019-20 Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete,” by National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2019 ([http://fs.ncaa.org/Docs/eligibility\\_center/Student\\_Resources/CBSA.pdf](http://fs.ncaa.org/Docs/eligibility_center/Student_Resources/CBSA.pdf)).

have to meet the academic eligibility outlined in Figure 1. Students who wish to play in Division II sports must graduate from high school, score at least a 68 on the ACT, or score at least a 900 on the SAT, and maintain a GPA of 2.5 or higher in their core classes. Individuals who do not meet these requirements have to redshirt their first year or play in Division III.

The NCAA (2019) stated, “Division III rules minimize potential conflicts between athletics and academics and focus on regional in-season and conference play to maximize academic, co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities” (p. 26). Therefore, students who participate in Division III institutions have the opportunity to focus more on their academic success. Division III maintains a level of competitiveness; however, it is not as competitive as the other two divisions (NCAA, 2019). Institutions that are within

this division determine their own requirements for eligibility. Individuals who play at the community college level are required to graduate from high school and to meet their selected institution’s academic eligibility requirements (NCAA, 2019).



*Figure 1.* Division 2 high school student athlete academic college eligibility requirements. Adapted from “2019-20 Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete,” by National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2019 ([http://fs.ncaa.org/Docs/eligibility\\_center/Student\\_Resources/CBSA.pdf](http://fs.ncaa.org/Docs/eligibility_center/Student_Resources/CBSA.pdf)).

### **College Eligibility**

Individuals who wish to remain student athletes throughout their collegiate eligibility must maintain all NCAA requirements and their institution requirements. All student athletes who play in Division I and II sports have to register and pay through the NCAA to receive a certification; however, individuals who play Division III do not have to pay and do not need a certification (NCAA, 2019). Although each division has separate eligibility requirements, student -athletes who play in all division sports and at

the community college level experience the pressures of balancing their dual-role status. Research supports that student athletes endure stress caused by challenges and demands of maintaining their eligibility (Adams, 2018; Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Eitzen, 2012; Hackett, 2011; Letawsky Shultz, 2017).

Eitzen (2012) stated, “Athletes in these commercialized, professionalized programs have trouble reconciling the roles associated with their dual status of athlete and student” (p. 158). As a result, some students either drop out or have to redshirt because of their academic ineligibility. According to the NCAA (n.d.), “Student-athletes are allowed five years of eligibility and athletically related financial aid” (p. 1). Table 3 outlines the eligibility requirements for student athletes who wish to remain playing collegiate sports.

The division level of play adds more demands on student athletes to perform at higher rates of excellence both on and off the field. These demands have both challenges and rewards for student athletes. Challenges experienced among this population require supports to maintain academic and athletic eligibility that ultimately results in successful outcomes (Adams, 2018; Emetu, 2019; Letawsky Shultz, 2017; Stiles Hanlon, 2018; Wright, 2019). It also requires a level of understanding of the experiences of the student athlete. Comeaux and Harrison (2011) asserted that the “failure to fully understand the distinct experiences of college student-athletes can have a significant impact on the extent to which we understand the need for specific forms of campus assistance and can affect questions of policy in higher education” (p. 235). Thus, retention of student athletes involves institutional commitment and legislative support of increased service delivery among this population (Tinto, 1993, 2012).

Table 3

*Academic Collegiate Student Athlete Eligibility*

Division	Eligibility requirements
I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By the second year, complete 40% of required coursework</li> <li>• By the end of third year, complete 60% of required coursework</li> <li>• By the fourth year, complete 80% of required coursework</li> <li>• Earn 6 credit hours</li> <li>• Maintain required GPA (NCAA, n.d.).</li> </ul>
II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete 24 degree credits each year</li> <li>• Complete 18-semester hours between fall and spring commencement</li> <li>• Complete a full-time nine-semester hours each term</li> <li>• Maintain a cumulative 2.0 GPA each academic year</li> <li>• During full-time status, complete first 10 semesters within 4 seasons (NCAA, n.d.).</li> </ul>
III	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain academic standing</li> <li>• Be continuously enrolled in 12 units or hours</li> <li>• Make degree progress (NCAA, n.d.)</li> </ul>
Junior college	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain continuous full-time enrollment</li> <li>• Complete 36 or 48 hours of first academic season</li> <li>• Maintain 2.0 GPA</li> <li>• Complete 24 or 36 units in second academic season (NJCAA, 2019)</li> </ul>

*Note.* Adapted from “Staying on Track to Graduate, by National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d. (<http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/current/staying-track-graduate>); *Eligibility Pamphlet*, by National Junior College Athletic Association, 2019 ([https://d2o2figo6ddd0g.cloudfront.net/p/q/u03t6snbpv3bdu/2019\\_-\\_2020\\_NJCAA\\_Eligibility\\_Pamphlet.pdf](https://d2o2figo6ddd0g.cloudfront.net/p/q/u03t6snbpv3bdu/2019_-_2020_NJCAA_Eligibility_Pamphlet.pdf)).

**The Experiences of African American Males at Community Colleges**

African American males are more likely to enroll at the community college level than the university level compared to other ethnicities (Branch, 2017; PNPI, 2017, PPIC, 2016). Research shows that African American males are less prepared for college, are

more likely to be enrolled in remedial courses, are less likely to obtain an associate's degree, and are more likely to come from low-socioeconomic backgrounds (ACT, 2016; Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014, 2016; PNPI, 2017). A. D. Williams et al.'s (2017) study examined the lived experiences of African American males who participated in an Educational Opportunity Fund program at a community college. The results showed that although the participants were supported through the program, they still experienced challenges. The participants expressed that community college programs should do more to increase the confidence of African American male students. The participants highlighted that the negative perceptions and stereotypes of the college community slowed down their progress. Branch's (2017) study explored the factors why African American males drop out of community college. The participants expressed that they dropped out of college because of having to balance both school and employment. The findings revealed that academic advising was of no help to the students. The participants shared that they were unprepared for the rigors of college and dropped out because of the lack of a sufficient academic foundation. Most importantly, the participants highlighted the need for acquiring strong support networks to prevent attrition among African American males. F. Harris and Wood's (2013) study showed that African American males who do not feel a sense of belonging on their campuses are more likely to fail. Adams-Mahaley (2012) explained that obtaining a degree within the community college system for African American males is difficult and presents challenges that require institutional effort to provide this marginalized population with effective supportive services to address the issues of educational equity. Kim (2014) suggested that for African American males to be successful in higher education, there

must be commitment and effort among the leadership and faculty. The institution must be committed to providing opportunities for African American males to succeed through access to knowledge, information, and supportive services. Faculty and staff must be committed to building relationships with African American males to foster their growth and development.

### **The Experiences of African American Male Athletes at Community Colleges**

The college degree enhances the life for adults seeking economic growth and career options, is emotionally satisfying, and provides an overall better quality of life and healthier people (Hahn & Truman, 2015; Markus, Lindsay, and Kenneth, 2013). Individuals enter college with a goal to attain a quality education potentially leading to a certificate, degree, or transfer. African American males who attend college for athletics have the same goal. According to Cuyjet (2006), first-time student athletes encounter academic and social challenges as they navigate the responsibility of being a student and an athlete. For African American male student athletes, their challenges increase because of the color of their skin, precollege experiences, low-socioeconomic status, generational status, and the pressures of being first in their family to attend college or “make it big” to provide support for their families (Chaplin, 2019; Conroy, 2016; Gaines, 2012; Mosby, 2009; Small, 2013). Richburg’s (2014) study explored the perceptions of African American male student athletes at an urban community college. The participants revealed that they encountered racial biases among faculty and staff. In addition, the participants expressed that institutions should assist in building collaborative relationships with African American male student athletes. The findings concluded that institutions should recruit more faculty and staff of color for African American male



student athletes to feel a sense of belonging. In Stiles Hanlon's (2018) study of factors that matter to California community college athletes, African American male student athletes reported feeling less welcomed among faculty and staff. The results indicated that African American male student athletes did not have meaningful relationships with faculty and staff both inside and outside of the classroom. The author concluded that African American male student athletes need to receive supports that contribute to scholarly development. Veloz's (2015) study revealed that although some of the African American male student athlete participants had positive relationships with faculty and staff, the consensus among the participants was that they did not feel cared for among faculty and staff. Some of the participants expressed that they experienced homelessness and hunger but were not provided with adequate support from their institution. Other participants shared that their professors were disrespectful and unsupportive of their academic endeavors. Unfortunately, the participants experienced racism and were viewed as ignorant and dumb jocks among faculty and staff. This confirmed Ferrante, Etzel, and Lantz's (1996) study finding, which showed that staff and faculty members viewed African American male student athletes as dumb jocks who are "over privileged, pampered, lazy and out of control, and whose primary motivation to attend school is to participate in sports" (p. 4). Stereotypical attitudes, racial biases, microaggressions, and other forms of racism, discrimination, and oppression prevent African American male student athletes from experiencing higher educational success (Anthony, 2016; Davis, 2016; Hotchkins, 2016; S. Lee, 2017; S. Lee, Bernstein, Etzel, Gearity, & Kuklick, 2018; Walker, 2019). Howard (2013) suggested that for African American males to succeed, more attention needs to be given to building meaningful relationships between faculty

and students. Tinto (2012) agreed that social support from faculty inside and outside of the classroom is a predictor of success for student retention, persistence, and degree attainment.

### **Barriers to Higher Educational Success Among African American Males**

African American males experience unsuccessful outcomes in higher education compared to their counterparts (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). According to Wood (2012), less than 50% of African American males who enter college will obtain a degree. In the midst of experiencing police brutality, poverty, community violence, and trauma, African American males encounter barriers to higher educational success (Branch, 2017; S. M. Harris, 2018). These barriers include but are not limited to stereotypes, racism, and racial biases, financial issues caused by their socioeconomic status, and unpreparedness.

### **Stereotypes, Racism, and Racial Bias**

Research has shown that African American males experience racism, endure stereotypical attitudes, and encounter racial bias among institutional faculty and staff and their peers throughout their collegiate journey (Beamon, 2014; Bimper, 2015; Fuller, 2017; Murty & Roebuck, 2015; Singer, 2016; W. A. Smith, Mustaffa, Jones, Curry, & Allen 2016; Wilkins, 2014). Hall (2007) stated, “African-American males have been the focal point for various forms of racism given their perception as threatening” (p. 207). E. L. Wells’s (2017) study showed that African American males in community college experienced negative stereotypes among faculty and staff. The participants indicated that they did not feel cared for by the college’s leadership. Sadly, the participants were discouraged and were unmotivated because of the harmful perceptions that their

instructors held about them. The author suggested that as supportive services increase, so will the academic success of African American males.

Rahman's (2018) study investigated the factors that impact matriculation among African American males at a community college. The findings revealed that the participants experience racism and stereotypes that hindered their academic success. Likewise, Harden's (2019) study explored the microaggressions that African American males experience at community colleges. The study found that the participants expected to endure stereotypes caused by the negative images and perceptions they heard about African American males. The participants expressed that they, in fact, do endure microaggressions, stereotypes, and racism from faculty and students; however, they responded with resilience. In Newman, Wood, and Harris's (2015) study, African American males experienced racial stereotypes from their professors. The findings showed that the participants who did not receive positive messages from institutional staff experienced a decrease in their sense of belonging caused by stereotypical attitudes. African American males have to endure racism, oppression, and discrimination at a young age, which continues throughout their entire life. This type of treatment results in negative outcomes such as dropping out of school, masculinity issues, psychological stress, and hopelessness (A. Coleman, O'Neil, & Ferris, 2019; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012; D. B. Lee et al., 2018; Singer, 2016; Staggers-Hakim, 2016; J. Williams, Aiyer, Durkee, & Tolan, 2014). M. K. Foster (2005) stated, "It is not only occasional open acts of racism that create a hostile climate, but also unintended acts of ignorance, routine questioning and disparagement of Black peoples' intelligence, and a history of excluding African-Americans from the institution" (p. 493). Therefore, for African American males to have

successful outcomes in higher education, attention needs to be given to eradicating racism. Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (2011) added,

We see African American males as “problems” that our society must find ways to eradicate. We regularly determine them to be the root cause of most problems in school and society. We seem to hate their dress, their language and their effect. We hate that they challenge authority and command so much social power. While the society apparently loves them in narrow niches and specific slots—music, basketball, football, crack—we seem less comfortable with them than in places like the national Honor Society, the debate team, or the computer club. (p. 9)

### **Financial Issues**

Although 2-year colleges’ tuition is way less expensive than 4-year colleges’ tuition, individuals who come from low-income backgrounds and who are first-generation college students (FGCS) struggle with the means to pay for college and to care for their basic necessities (R. M. Evans, 2016; Mojica, 2017; Royal, 2017; K. A. Tate et al., 2015). According to Richburg (2014), “Many of the Black male student athletes in community college are usually members of one or both the underserved and underprepared populations” (p. 20). Research has shown that African American college students are more likely to come from low-income households who are FGCS and struggle with affording to navigate their way through college (Ball, 2015; Kosses, 2019; Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014; Sommerfeld & Bowen, 2013; Wilkins, 2014). As a result, African Americans encounter academic challenges and are forced to drop out of college because of their economic instability. The findings revealed that a significant number of participants in the study were low-income and FGCS. The participants

indicated that they had to work to care for themselves and their other responsibilities. The work-school balance was a stressor that created academic challenges among the participants. Wood et al.'s, (2016) study revealed that African American males who were enrolled in community college had to work because of their low-socioeconomic status. The participants revealed that they experienced fatigue and conflict with their supervisors that prevented them from being fully engaged in their academic goals. It was recommended that students be provided with more flexible schedules to balance the stressor of work-school demands to prevent attrition. In Gaines's (2012) study, African American male student athletes shared that they were stressed out because of financial issues. The participants also had difficulties with managing being a student athlete and indicated that they were unprepared for college. Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker, and Williams's (2019) report showed that over 25% of African American males who were enrolled within the community college system experienced homelessness and hunger. F. Harris et al., (2017) explained that African American males experience such challenging issues because of their low-income status. The authors indicated that although these individuals are provided with financial aid, it does not cover their basic necessity expenses. Kirkman's (2018) study examined the experiences of African American males enrolled at the community college level. The participants expressed that being a FGCS was a factor that hindered their degree completion. Financial support was found to be a challenge among the participants. The findings also revealed that the participants had difficulty navigating college and enduring racism. Ingram, Williams, Coaxum, Hilton, and Harrell's (2016) study found that African American males who attended an urban community college experienced financial difficulty. The participants

described that they had to work while attending school to take care of their homes. Taking care of their personal needs was also a difficulty expressed among the participants.

### **Unpreparedness**

According to ACT's (2016) report, African Americans are the largest ethnic group that is unprepared for college. The findings showed that African American students scored lower in math and reading. African American males had poorer outcomes than African American females. As a result, these students are unprepared for the rigors of college and are placed in remedial college courses. The Campaign for College Opportunity's (2015) report showed that a large percentage of African Americans enroll at the community college and are required to take remedial courses. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education's [NCPPE] (2007) report revealed that community colleges are not required to prepare students to take college assessments. As a result, these circumstances contribute to the degree attainment gap among African American males. Veloz's (2015) study revealed that the majority of African American male student athlete participants were unprepared for college. The participants highlight that they did not attend classes but were given grades, which contributed to their lack of preparedness. Additionally, the participants shared that they were enrolled in remedial courses because of their academic deficiencies. Grissett's (2019) study investigated the challenges experienced among African American male student athletes. The findings showed that the participants were unprepared for college. The participants indicated that they lacked academic skills and had academic deficiencies. Similarly, Price's (2010) study showed that African American male student

athletes who had academic deficits were forced to enroll at the community college level because they did not qualify for university enrollment. The participants were unprepared for college and lacked basic academic skills. Ingram et al. (2016) stated,

If community colleges do not learn about the dimensions of their campus environment, they will be contributing to another century of African American male community college students questioning their identity, being academically surpassed by women, and being mistakenly perceived as outsiders.

Understanding how to increase the motivation of African American men in community college, which impacts their academic success, is beneficial. (p. 5)

### **California Community College Athletic Association**

The California Community College Athletic Association is one of two governing bodies that administer oversight to community colleges. The other governing body is the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCCA). The NJCCA includes most of the states except California and some parts of Oregon and Washington (Causby, 2010). In September of 1951, the California Community College Athletic Association banned state schools from participating in the NJCAA. Therefore, the California Community College Athletic Association acts independently of the NJCCA. The California Community College Athletic Association is represented in 14 conferences, which include 12 men's sports and 12 women's sports across the 114 community colleges (California Community College Athletic Association, n.d.-a). The California Community College Athletic Association (n.d.-a) stated its purpose "is to establish and oversee the enforcement of the rules and regulations and to guide the administration of the intercollegiate athletic programs of the California community colleges" (p. 1).

## **Characteristics of California Community College Female and Male Intercollegiate Student Athletes**

Student athletes participate from throughout the state of California. Cal-Pass Plus (2019c) reported enrollment of 22,354 of student athletes in 2017-2018 compared to student nonathletes (1,974,716). Of the reported student athletes, there were 7,805 females 14,544 males, and other/unknown accounted for 12. The number of student athletes who attempted at least 12 units in both fall and spring semesters of 2017-2018 were 69% female and 58% male. The number of student athletes who attempted at least 12 units during fall semester but less than 12 units during the spring semester of 2017-2018 were 18% female and 27% male. The number of student athletes who attempted at least 12 units during the spring semester but less than 12 units during the fall semester of 2017-2018 were 8% female and 8% male (Cal-Pass Plus, 2019c).

The California community college system has a diverse athletic population. Table 4 provides the ethnicity breakdown of California community college student athletes compared to student nonathletes. The racial groups with the most student athletes are Hispanics, Whites, and African Americans. The Cal-Pass Plus (2019c) database showed that within the Hispanic population, there were 901,995 student nonathletes and 9,382 student athletes. There were 536,523 student nonathletes who are White and 6,030 student athletes who are White. There were 126,649 African American student nonathletes and 3,636 African Americans who were student athletes in the 2017-2018 academic year.



Table 4

*Ethnic Breakdown of Student Athletes and Student Nonathletes*

Ethnicity	All student athletes statewide, 2017-2018	Nonathletes statewide, 2017-2018
Asian	619	208,189
Black or African American	3,636	126,649
Hispanic/Latino	9,382	901,995
Two or more races	1,818	86,568
White	6,030	536,623

*Note.* Adapted from “Student Athlete Report,” by Cal-Pass Plus, 2019b (<https://www.calpassplus.org/Reports/Student-Athletes>).

### **Supporting African American Males in Community College**

Although national statistics show that African American males have unsuccessful outcomes in higher education compared to other ethnic groups, research has agreed that they should receive supports to increase their academic success (Beckett, 2015; Bratton, 2017; Emetu, 2019; Hewitt-Clarke, 2019; Kirkman, 2018; Pickett, 2017). Literature has showed that community colleges that have male-based initiative for students of color experience higher retention and persistence rates, which allows the individuals to obtain degrees or successfully transfer to a 4-year university (J. D. Coleman, 2016; Harewood, 2013; Nichols, 2017; Staples, 2017; W. C. White, 2016). These researchers found that the initiatives include academic and social supports such as academic advising, tutoring, mentoring, student-faculty relationships, and campus involvement. The initiatives also include involvement in programs that provide financial assistance to meet the basic needs of students and offset the cost of tuition.

## **Academic Supports**

Ingram and Coaxum (2018) stated, “Community colleges must be challenged like 4-year institutions to improve the educational outcomes and close the academic achievement gap between African American males and other ethnic groups” (p. xiv). Therefore, to change the narrative of the deficit achievement gap among African American males, community colleges must provide them with support and services to increase their academic success. Nichols’s (2017) study examined the factors of community college completion among African American males who participated in an academic mentoring initiative. The participants expressed that participation in the academic program allowed them to experience academic success. Some of the participants shared that they were exposed to meaningful opportunities that they would not have been privileged to if they had not been enrolled in the program. The mentoring that the participants received increased their motivation, which resulted in successful academic, social, and career outcomes. Kim’s (2014) study investigated the factors that led to graduation among African American males at their community college. The participants expressed that the college environment was nurturing and supportive. The findings revealed that the college provided the students with academic assistance and advising. The college allowed the participants to have online access to advisors and professors to receive help when needed. As a result, this allowed the participants to build supportive relationships with faculty and staff. Coburn’s (2017) study explored the factors that allowed African American males to successfully transfer from a community college to a 4-year university. The findings revealed that the academic success of the participants included their participation in study groups, academic counseling, and a well-

balanced course load. The participants expressed their determination to be financially stable and dispelling stereotypes as motivational factors to succeed.

The Center for Community College Student Engagement (2014) report showed that over 60% of African American males who attend community college do not graduate on time; therefore, to increase retention and persistence rates among African American males, community colleges must find ways to provide for their academic, social, and emotional needs. In Pickett's (2017) study, African American males who were enrolled at the community college level were interviewed regarding institutional supports that contributed to their academic success. The participants shared that access to academic centers and academic advising allowed them to be successful. Receiving academic advising allowed the participants to develop meaningful relationships with faculty and staff, which was an additional factor that contributed to their success. Tinto's (1993) college retention theory explained that students of color should be provided with academic supports to increase their retention and persistence rates. The author added that students of color benefit from receiving services among faculty and staff who have similar cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the academic success of African American males, including those who are student athletes, involves their individual responsibility and motivation to succeed and the commitment of institutional faculty and staff (Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, Ozaki and Spaid (2016) stated,

Findings and insight that have emerged from our research on the experiences of men of color in community colleges confirm that campus resources need not only be available but also accessible and efficacious in order for them to have a desired impact on student success for men of color. (p. 42)

## **Social Supports**

Ozaki and Spaid (2016) stated, “The accessibility and efficacy of campus resources are especially important for men of color because the social construction of masculinity encourages men to embrace the attitude of independence and to avoid vulnerability and weakness” (p. 42). Therefore, it is a necessity that African American males be provided with adequate supports within the higher educational system to experience success. Furthermore, it is imperative that community colleges provide sufficient supports to African American males that result in degree completion and the successful transfer to a 4-year university. St. Louis Community College’s (2011) report on their Black Male Initiative program showed that participants of the program received peer and community mentoring that provided participants of the program with a sense of belonging and an increase in self-efficacy. Fletcher’s (2015) study showed that social support, such as positive interactions among faculty and staff, allowed African American males at their community colleges to experience first-year success. The participants were a part of a learning community in which they received academic and social support. The participants expressed that the relationships they developed with faculty and staff motivated them to stay in school. Most importantly, the participants created clubs and support groups to help other students as a result of the social support they received from faculty and staff.

Cunningham’s (2013) study revealed that African American males who participated in a community college mentoring program increased their retention rates. The participants highlighted that the relationships and guidance received among faculty and staff were valuable. The findings showed that program resources and social

interactions motivated the students which contributed to their persistence. Byrd's (2017) study revealed the factors that contribute to successful completion among African American male student athletes at the community college level. The findings showed that the athlete resource center was highly utilized among the participants. Through the center, the participants were able to access academic, social, and emotional support. The participants expressed appreciation for the social support they received from their teammates. The author concluded with the development of social supports among African American male student athletes at the community college level to foster retention and persistence. K. A. White's (2014) study explored the perceptions of African American male student athletes who participated in a California community college campus support program. The findings showed that this social support group allowed the participants to experience retention and persistence. The all-male support group increased academic engagement, self-efficacy, and relationships among the participants. The author suggested that similarly, all-male support groups be replicated throughout the California community college to increase African American male degree attainment. Tinto's (2012) Framework of Institutional Action outlined that academic, social, and financial supports allow students to succeed in college. The author explained that these supports are necessary to increase retention and persistence rates. Therefore, African American male student athletes should be provided with supportive services to close the degree attainment gap within this population as it is the lowest out of all ethnic groups. Ingram and Coaxum (2018) stated,

The true success of African American males in community colleges rests on how well these institutions engage young men into their institutions. This will require

community colleges to examine policies, pedagogical strategies, and institutional practices that alienate African American males and fosters a culture of underachievement. (p. xiv)

### **Theoretical Framework**

Research confirms that African American males should be provided with support throughout their collegiate journey to obtain degrees, to narrow the degree obtainment gap between African Americans and Whites, and to lower their college dropout rates (Byrd, 2017; CCCCO, 2018; Kosses, 2019; Pickett, 2017; St. Surin, 2015; Veloz, 2015). Higher educational institutions provide students with academic, cultural, social, emotional, vocational, psychological, and financial support so that students can grow both personally and professionally and obtain degrees (Alamuddin & Bender, 2018; Giancola, & Davidson, 2015; Tinto, 2012; Topham, 2016; Wilson, 2018). The literature has shown that programs such as the Black Male Initiative or African American Male Initiative provide African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes with the holistic support they need to obtain degrees (Brooms, 2018; J. D. Coleman, 2016; Harewood, 2013; Nichols, 2017; Riley-Tepie, 2018). Tinto's (1993) college retention theory provides a blueprint to colleges on effective strategies to maintain persistence and retention rates of students of color by providing them with supportive services and maintaining their commitment of addressing the needs of all students. Tinto's (2012) Framework of Institutional Action outlines specific academic, financial, and social supports that are needed for individuals to succeed in college.

## **Framework of Institutional Action**

### **Academic Supports**

It is no secret that African American men have the least favorable outcomes throughout their higher educational experience. They are more likely to attend a 2-year college versus a 4-year college, less likely to obtain a degree, and more likely to experience challenges that lead to their departure from college (Tinto, 2012). Individuals who have college degrees earn more money than those who do not and can experience economic stability. Tinto (1975) outlined several characteristics that lead to student departure from college, which include precollege experiences, family background, institutional commitment, goal commitment, academic and social integration, peer group and faculty interaction. Although individuals who enter college that are unprepared, are low-income, and experience challenges, they can succeed with the assistance of the institution through receiving supportive services (Castleman & Goodman, 2018; Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006; Tinto, 2012).

According to Tinto (2012), “We must recognize that a college or university, once having admitted a student, has an obligation to do what it can to help the student stay and graduate” (p. 7). The author explained that this can be achieved through providing academic, social, and financial support to students. Academic support includes but is not limited to basic-skills courses (Tinto, 1993), educational planning tools (California Association of Community College Registrars and Admissions Officers & CCCCCO, 2018), academic advising (Education Strategy Group, American Association of Community Colleges, & Association of Community College Trustees, 2018), tutoring (Dadgar, Nodine, Bracco, & Venezia, 2013), supplemental instruction (Choitz, 2006),

remedial courses (Chen & Simone, 2016), learning centers (Dadgar et al., 2013), and programs such as Equal Opportunity Program Services and Summer Bride (Tinto, 2012) that enhance students' knowledge and academic intellectual ability. Tinto (2012) explained that the success of students heavily weighs on their first-year experience through academic integration. The author indicated that academic support is critical for retention and persistence, especially for low-income and African American students.

Ellis's (2011) study found that African American male student athletes elected to enroll in a community college based on the resources that they provided to students. The participants explained that academic-focused coaching and supportive networks such as relationships with faculty contributed to their decision to enroll at their selected community colleges. Dabney's (2012) study explored the factors that contributed to postsecondary success among African American males. The participants indicated that tutoring and teaching assistance along with their individual motivation were factors that contributed to their success. In Bratton's (2017) study of the academic success of African American males, advisors were indicated as a factor that contributed to their success. The participants highlighted their appreciation for advisors who were from the same gender and culture. E. L. Wells's (2017) study examined the perceptions of African American males enrolled in a developmental education program at community college. The participants expressed that the program was valuable to their educational success. In order to keep African American males in college and prevent them from leaving, they must be provided with academic supports. The studies previously mentioned show that African American males, both student athletes and student nonathletes, can experience success through academic supports. Tinto's (1993) stated, "The first principle of



effective retention can be stated as follows: effective retention programs are committed to the students they serve, they put student welfare ahead of other institutional goals” (p. 146). Therefore, community colleges must be committed to addressing the academic needs of African American males, a commitment that will allow them to experience academic achievement.

### **Financial Supports**

Tinto (1993) explained that institutions need to remain committed to developing campus-wide supports for student academic success. Financial assistance is one support that students need to afford college tuition. Tinto (2012) stated, “Short-term institutional financial support is vital to students if they are to keep pace with the demands of classroom work” (p. 31). Financial support can come in the form of loans, scholarships, grants, stipends, internships, and work study programs. Tinto (1993) indicated that students of color need programs because “students of color are, on the average, more likely to be academically at-risk and to come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds than are white students generally” (p. 185).

Lipscomb’s (2018) study investigated college engagement among African American males enrolled in community college who received gift aid. The findings showed that African American males who received financial aid also received financial advising. The participants expressed that they were able to access tutoring services and academic advising support, which contributed to successful outcomes. L. M. Smith’s (2016) study of program factors that contribute to African American male success within the community college system found that financial assistance is needed to mitigate the issue of their coming from low-socioeconomic homes. The author suggested that

institutions provide more financial assistance to African American students to increase their persistence rates. According to Dassance (2011), “Providing more opportunity to underserved populations in higher education fit well with the social impetus to end poverty and racial and gender inequities” (p. 32), which includes African American males. Although there is a lack of research that investigates financial support provided to African American males within the community college system; Tinto’s (2012) Framework of Institutional Action supports that financial assistance is needed for individuals to complete college.

### **Social Supports**

Tinto (1993) explained that because of high rates of departure of students of color, they require more support than their counterparts. The author explained that supports and services such as counseling, psychological services, peer support groups, faculty relationships, extracurricular activities, and cultural programs are predictors of success among students of color. Tinto (1975) indicated that students must have successful and meaningful experiences within these supports to experience success. Tinto (2012) explained that not only must students have positive experiences within these supports, but they also should influence the individual’s self-efficacy.

Bratton’s (2017) study of African American males who participated in an academic program revealed that counselors, mentors, and faculty staff contributed to their success. The participants indicated that the social support they received from institutional staff was beneficial and allowed them to grow. The development of relationships with faculty and staff allowed the students to have academic and emotional support. Most notably, the participants highlighted that they were valued by their

mentors, and their mentors were valuable to them. McClellan's (2013) study explored the factors that promote and deter African American male student athletes' success in community college. Positive interaction among faculty and staff was highlighted among the participants. The participants described that the support they received from faculty and staff was uplifting and motivated them to work harder. Most importantly, the participants unanimously explained that faculty support is needed with the African American male student athletes and African American students in general for higher institutional success. Brannon's (2015) study explored the factors that contribute to successful degree completion among African American males at a community college. The participants expressed that developing personal connections with their peers and faculty and staff was a factor that continued to their success. In addition, the participants were involved in campus activities and were engaged in the campus community, which were predictors of their success.

Tinto's (1993) third principle of effective retention states, "Effective retention programs are committed to the development of support social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members" (p. 147). Therefore, environments that are safe, nurturing, and supportive are necessary for African Americans to thrive and to excel academically. Tinto (2012) added that social support allows students to feel a sense of belonging on their campuses and increases their connectedness and student engagement. The author stressed the importance of students developing informal and formal relationships with faculty and staff that extend outside of the classroom. Most importantly, social support reduces stress and allows for individuals

to focus on achieving their academic goals, which is needed within the African American male community college population to narrow the degree attainment gap.

### **Summary**

The narrative of African American males has been filled with unsuccessful outcomes due solely to their skin color. The racism, police brutality, community violence, and trauma that they endure continue to put them at-risk of not being able to live a quality life. Not only do African American males experience negative outcomes in high school, they continue to experience them in college. In order to change the narrative of African American male student nonathletes and African American male student athletes, higher educational institutions must be committed to providing supportive services that address their holistic needs. This includes academic advising and comprehensive support programs that include social, academic, mentorship, and mental health services.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### **Overview**

Chapter III defines the methodology used to answer the research questions of this phenomenological study. It begins with restating the purpose statement and research questions. Phenomenology is described in detail along with the population, target population, and sampling frame utilized to select the participants of the study. This chapter also includes a discussion of reliability, validity, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis. In addition, the limitations and summary conclude the chapter.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and differences between African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the lived experiences of African American male student athletes at California community colleges?
2. What are the lived experiences of African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges?
3. How do the lived experiences of African American male student athletes differ from African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges?

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological methodology to explore the lived experiences of African American male student athletes and African American male

student nonathletes at California community colleges. Given (2008) stated, “Phenomenology may explore the unique meanings of any human experience or phenomenon” (p. 614). The participants in this study were selected to describe their experiences of either being an African American male student athlete or African American male student nonathlete at the community college level. J. Mills and Birks (2014) explained that the goal of qualitative research is to understand the human experience. The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes who attend California community colleges. This is the first study to explore the experiences of African American male student athletes compared to African American male student nonathletes at the community college level. Therefore, these participants were selected because their stories will provide a blueprint for supporting African American males who desire to attend community colleges, both those who are student athletes and those who are student nonathletes. In addition, the participants were chosen because they are currently living their experiences. Given (2008) stated, “The term lived experience derives from the German *erlebnis*—experience as we live through it and recognize it as a particular type of experience” (p. 616).

### **Qualitative Methodology**

Qualitative inquiry is an exploratory research methodology. A qualitative approach is used to gain a deeper insight into a problem, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts of the human experience. Moreover, qualitative inquiry focuses on the phenomena. Merriam and Grenier (2019) stated, “It is thus the goal of a qualitative research study to uncover and understand the experience of the phenomenon from the participants’

perspectives” (p. ix). Furthermore, Patton (2015) explained that qualitative research illustrates how humans make sense of their experiences.

Klenke, Martin, and Wallace (2016) stated, “Qualitative research is a process of naturalistic inquiry that seeks in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural setting or context” (p. 6). According to Given (2008), naturalistic inquiry involves a social construct of human interaction or behavior that is understood in its natural environment. Likewise, Schwandt (2007) explained,

Naturalistic inquiry is the name for a particular methodology that emphasizes understanding and portraying social action (i.e., the meaning, character, nature of social life) from the point of view of social actors. It emphasizes that this kind of understanding can be forthcoming only from first-hand, eyewitness accounts of “being there.” It aims at faithful, authentic reproduction and representation of others’ ways of life. (p. 206)

Therefore, the participants were interviewed in their natural setting to understand their experiences and to provide authenticity to their way of life of either being an African American male student athlete or African American male student nonathlete who attend California community colleges. Furthermore, Mason (2017) explained that through qualitative inquiry, one’s life history is explored through a variety of approaches as they are the social actors who interpret their life’s narrative and make meaning of their experiences.

Qualitative research is primarily inductive, mainly does not seek to develop hypotheses, and occurs in the natural setting of the participants. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described qualitative research as “a type of research that refers to an

in-depth study using face-to-face or observation techniques to collect data from people in their nature settings” (p. 489). Qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the experiences of humans, a goal that requires the researcher to capture stories of the participants. Patton (2015) explained that qualitative methodology tells the stories of the participants from their perspectives. Thus, this study highlights the stories of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes and their experiences in college.

According to Klenke et al. (2016), “Qualitative research employs purposive or theoretical sampling, meaning the researcher intentionally selects participants who can contribute an in-depth, information-rich understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (p. 9). Patton (2015) described information-rich cases as individuals who can provide information critical to understanding the purpose of the conducted research. The purpose of this study was to document how African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes make meaning of their community college experience. The individuals in this study were selected because they have direct experience relating to the purpose of this study.

Likewise, qualitative inquiry makes comparisons, illuminates similarities, and identifies differences. Klenke et al. (2016) explained that this information is communicated through the collection of quotes from the participants who are individually interviewed by the researcher. The authors indicated that the information that is collected through the participants’ stories is interpreted by the researcher to find patterns across the data. Additionally, these patterns involve reporting the participants’ voices and collective shared perceptions to provide a detailed account of the phenomena.



## **Phenomenology**

The purpose of utilizing a phenomenological approach is to provide a written account of the lived experiences of individuals. Merleau-Ponty (2013) stated phenomenology is used to “describe the basic structures of human experience and understanding from a first person point of view” (p. viii). Likewise, Carlson et al. (2016) explained that phenomenology brings attention to the human experience. Van Manen (2016) added that the purpose of the lived experience is to report human life as it is lived by the individual. The lives of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes who attend community colleges are explored throughout this study.

Patton (2015) explained that phenomenology “requires methodically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (p. 115). Therefore, through phenomenology, the participants are able to interpret their experiences through their own understanding. Melnick (2011) explained that the aim of phenomenology is to become consciously aware of one’s experiences so that the individual can make sense of them. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) added that the phenomenology allows participants to make sense of their current experiences. The individuals in this study were allowed to tell their stories from their point of view. Given (2008) explained that any human experience can be investigated through phenomenology. Hence, this study sought to explore the experiences of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes at the community college level.

Qualitative studies can be conducted through a phenomenological focus or a phenomenological philosophical perspective. According to Patton (2015), “A phenomenological study [as opposed to a phenomenological perspective] is one that focuses on the descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience” (p. 117). In addition, Carlson et al. (2016) described phenomenology as participants telling their experiences as they experience them. This study utilizes a phenomenological study approach that focused on how the participants experience what they experience. Furthermore, the participants provided insight into how they experience being an African American, a male, an athlete, a nonathlete, and a college student enrolled at a community college. Van Manen (1990) summed up phenomenology by stating,

In phenomenological research the emphasis is always on the meaning of the lived experience. The point of phenomenological research is to “borrow” other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experience in order to be better able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience. (p. 62)

### **Population**

A population is defined as a “group of elements, whether individuals, objects or events that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129). The individuals who were selected for this study because of their shared common criteria, which allowed the researcher to make generalizations from the data that were gathered. Given (2008)

stated, “Population as a concept in research methods refers to every individual who fits the criteria (broad or narrow) that the researcher has laid out for research participants” (p. 644). The California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office ([CCCCO], 2018) listed 115 community colleges with over 2.1 million students attending. There are 108 California community colleges with athletic programs. The population of this study was student athletes and student nonathletes who were currently enrolled at the California community college level at the time of this study. In the 2017-2018 academic year, there were 22,354 student athletes and 1,974,716 student nonathletes enrolled at all (combined) community colleges statewide (Cal-Pass Plus, 2018).

### **Target Population**

The target population for this study included choosing individuals who had similar experiences to provide information to answer this study’s research questions. Daniel (2011) explained that after defining the population, the researcher selects a subset of the target population. Check and Schutt (2011) indicated that the target population is “a set of elements larger than or different from the population that was sampled and to which the researcher would like to generalize any study findings” (p. 94). Therefore, the participants who were selected for this study are African American male student athletes and nonathletes who are enrolled at College of the Sequoias (COS), Fresno City College (FCC), and Merced Community College (MCC). These colleges were selected because of their larger enrollment of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes and because of the proximity of their location to the researcher. According to the California Community Colleges (2019), there were 123,607 African American students enrolled throughout all of the community colleges in

California in the fall 2017-2018 academic year. The Cal-Pass Plus (2019b) database reported that in 2017-2018 academic year there were 3,636 African American student athletes and 126,649 African American student nonathletes enrolled statewide throughout the California community college system. Additionally, there were 54 African American male student athletes and 363 African American male student nonathletes enrolled at COS, 58 African American male student athletes and 1,948 African American male student nonathletes enrolled at FCC, and 32 African American male student athletes and 483 African American male student nonathletes enrolled during the 2017-2018 academic year. Therefore, each academic year at COS, FCC, and MCC, there were approximately 144 African American male student athletes and 2,794 African American male student nonathletes enrolled (Cal-Pass Plus, 2019b) who are included in the target population of this study. Lewis-Beck, Bryman, Bryman, and Liao (2004) explained that researchers select a target population of appropriate participants who meet the characteristics of the study. The characteristics for participation in this study were individuals who

- Were African American
- Were Male
- Were student football athletes, were sophomores, played two seasons, and were academically eligible
- Were student nonathletes with a sophomore class standing
- Were enrolled at COS, FCC, or MCC
- Had consented to participate in this study.

## Sample

Qualitative research involves studying small samples that provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Given, 2008). A sampling frame is a subset of the population further identifying delimiting factors related to the actual study participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Qualitative studies traditionally include a smaller number of participants (Patton, 2015). Creswell (2013) indicated that for grounded theory qualitative studies there must be 20 to 30 participants to capture extensive detailed data about the phenomena. Dukes (1984) explained that in phenomenological studies, the researcher only needs to interview three to 10 participants. Riemen (1986) recommended that qualitative studies include up to 10 participants. However, Morse (1994) specified that there only need to be six participants when conducting a phenomenological study. Therefore, the participants who were selected to participate in this study included six African American male student athletes who were football players and six African American male student nonathletes who were currently enrolled at COS, FCC, and MCC. There were four participants, two African American male student athletes, and two African American male student nonathletes who were interviewed at each of the three colleges, thus making a total of 12 participants for this study. All of the participants of this study were carefully chosen through purposive sampling. Patton (2015) explained that “information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research; thus, the term purposeful sampling” (p. 53). Lewis-Beck et al. (2004) described purposeful sampling as an appropriate selection for participants who best fit the characteristics of the study. Likewise, Daniel (2011) explained that researchers select

purposeful sampling because the individuals meet the criteria of the study. Therefore, each individual was selected because they met the inclusion criteria of the study.

In addition, random purposive sampling was applied to increase the generalization of the larger population of the study (Given, 2008). Given (2008) stated, “After a purposive sampling process locates a set of eligible data sources, the next step might be to use random selection in deciding which cases to study” (p. 725). The purposive random sampling method was utilized to recruit African American male student athletes who were football players. The random sampling technique allows the researcher to recruit many participants, and then select a small number of them randomly based on the criteria of the study. The criteria included male football players who were sophomores, who played two seasons of football, and who were academically eligible. G. Mills and Gay (2019) explained that purposive random sampling “adds credibility to the study” (p. 160).

African American male student football athletes were recruited through a flyer that was posted in the locker room (Appendix A) and the football coaches assisted with recruiting participants for this study. Each coach selected five sophomores (a total of 15 participants) at their campus who had successfully completed two semesters. Participants contacted the researcher with their interest in being members of the study. The researcher emailed the demographic questionnaire. Participants who answered all the demographic questions were selected to partake in the study. African American male student nonathletes were recruited through a separate flyer (Appendix A) that was passed out through an African American male initiative meeting by the program’s coordinator. There were 30 participants who showed interest in the study and contacted the researcher

via email or by phone. Participants who met the criteria of the study were selected to partake in the study. Additionally, individuals who answered all the demographic questions were selected to participate in this study.

### **Instrumentation**

Instruments are utilized in qualitative studies to collect data from the participants to tell their stories. One way to collect data from the participants included in the study is through interviews (Patton, 2015). Interviews can be conducted through several techniques that allow the individual's voice to be captured thoroughly. Patton (2015) explained that in qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument of the study. This means that the researcher is responsible for developing the interview guide that contains open-ended questions that the participants answer to retrieve data that will answer the research questions of the study. The instrument was developed through a thorough analysis of the literature review regarding the experiences of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes that are outlined in the synthesis matrix (Appendix B). The researcher also has experience being an African American student athlete and has provided services to African American students at the community college level.

According to Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day (2012), qualitative interviews can occur through semistructured and unstructured interviewing techniques. The semistructured interviewing technique, which asked participants open-ended questions about their experiences related to this study's research questions, was used. Galletta and Cross (2013) explained that semistructured interviewing is "sufficiently structured to address specific topics related to the phenomenon of study, while leaving space for

participants to offer new meanings to the study focus” (p. 24). The semistructured interview is designed to highlight the participants’ lived experience. In the semistructured interview, the researcher speaks to the participants in a way to draw connections and engage with the individuals to allow them to feel safe. The in-depth interviewing process is a common method used for collecting data and is paired with the semistructured technique to ask probing questions that allow participants to elaborate freely on their ideas (Given, 2008).

### **Interviews**

A qualitative phenomenological method was utilized for this study to document the lived experiences of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes at COS, MCC, and FCC. In addition, participants were interviewed through a semistructured interviewing technique with an in-depth interviewing process. Van Manen (2016) described that the phenomenological interview “first of all serves the very specific purpose of exploring and gathering experiential narrative material, stories, or anecdotes that may serve as a resource for phenomenological reflection and thus develop a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon” (p. 231). Each individual was allowed to share his lived experience with being either an African American male student athletes or African American male student nonathletes at the community college level, providing answers through the interview protocol (Appendix C).

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument of the study in which he or she develops open-ended questions to ask the participants that will elicit data to answer the research questions of the study. The participants answered demographic questions



first to gain a better understanding of their experiences. In addition, the interview questions asked of the participants were associated with the alignment table (Appendix D), which was developed by skilled researchers who supported the research questions of this study. The interview questions were reviewed by the expert panel to ensure the accuracy and alignment to the research questions of this study. Furthermore, the participants were provided with an informed consent (Appendix E) form before the interview.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument of the study. Therefore, he or she is responsible for having prior knowledge of the topic, formulating research questions that will generate trustworthy data, collecting and analyzing data, and generalizing the findings. Given (2008) explained that “the researcher uses his or her prior knowledge of an area of study within a discipline, or across more than one discipline, to propose a well-crafted and coherent project with clearly articulated research questions” (p. 772). The researcher had a personal experience with being a former collegiate student athlete in the California community college system and California State University system. As a former collegiate student athlete, she earned a graduate degree in which she relied heavily upon noninstitutional supports to successfully complete her degrees because of the limited services at the institutional level. Therefore, there was room for potential bias.

### **Bias**

In every qualitative study, the researcher will have some type of bias regarding the human participant subjects being studied. Given (2008) stated, “Researchers, like

everyone else, are products of the social world and therefore have values that will be more or less apparent in their research” (p. 60). Consequently, it is common for researchers to study about topics they are familiar with. Mehra (2002) explained that “researchers decide to study a topic because they see a ‘personal connection’ to it at some level—either as a practitioner in the field, or as an individual” (p. 8). Thus, researchers have to ensure that they take the precautions necessary to avoid being biased in their study. The researcher has three African American male sons who could cause potential bias within the study. One way the researcher has addressed her bias is by ensuring that this study is trustworthy, dependable, and replicable, qualities that are discussed in the validity and reliability sections. Another way the researcher addressed her bias was by allowing the participants’ voices to be the dominant voice of the study so that their story was told from their point of view (Mehra, 2002).

### **Validity**

When conducting qualitative inquiry, the researcher must ensure that the study measures what it says it will measure (Given, 2008; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Research is considered to be valid when results can be replicated, there is trustworthiness of the findings, and the outcomes can be utilized throughout multiple settings (Leung, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; E. Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Given (2008) explained that validity can be increased in a study “by using strategies such as continual verification of findings, member checks, selfreflection, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, sampling sufficiency, theoretical thinking, and audit trails” (p. 909).

The researcher utilized an expert panel who have experience with service delivery at the community college level. The experts have doctoral degrees, have experience with

teaching qualitative research methods, and provide and develop services for African American males throughout the community college system. The experts examined the interview protocols (Appendix C) and ensured that they were aligned to answer the questions of this study. The experts provided feedback regarding the protocols and the question alignment table, which were properly adjusted.

Triangulation is another way that allows a study to obtain validity. Triangulation involves reporting “three ways of verifying or corroborating a particular event, description, or fact being reported by a study” (Yin, 2013, p. 81). The data of this study were triangulated through recoding interviews to record the exact statements of the participants. Secondly, the data were carefully scanned multiple times by the researcher to ensure accuracy and consistency of coding to explain the purpose of the study to generate understanding (Stenbacka, 2001). Triangulation was also achieved through member checking. According to Given (2008), member checking can be established

When researchers ask participants to elaborate on or clarify what they have said in interviews or done in observed scenes or when researchers sum up what they have heard at the end of an interview or seen following an observation session and then ask participants to comment on the accuracy of these summaries. (p. 501)

Participants were asked probing questions to elaborate on their ideas and for clarity of responses. The participants were also provided with a copy of their transcript following the transcription of their answers and were allowed to make any changes to reflect the accuracy of their lived experiences.

## **Reliability**

Any qualitative study must prove to be trustworthy, credible, and dependable for reporting and generalizing findings in research (Given, 2008; Golafshani, 2003; Patton, 2015). Establishing reliability in qualitative inquiry means that the study is good and can be replicated by others. Thyer (2010) explained that reliability is “the degree to which other researchers performing similar observations in the field and analysis such as reading field notes transcribed from narrative data would generate similar interpretations and results” (p. 356). The researcher took field notes of every participant in this study to accurately record their statements for consistency. Reliability can also be achieved through constant data comparison (Leung, 2015). The researcher scanned through the data multiple times to make connections in the participants’ statements. Additionally, the participants were provided with a transcript of their interview to confirm truthfulness of their statements. Finally, the researcher performed a field test on an athlete who was enrolled at a California community college to maintain accuracy of the results. The individual was provided with an informed consent form (Appendix E) and the interview questions prior to the interview. The field test was observed by a professor at a California university. Following the interview, the observer and the field participant provided the researcher with feedback, and changes were made to ensure reliability and validity for the participants in this study.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Every qualitative research study needs to ensure that it is ethical to all individuals involved in the study. Ethics include respecting the participants, ensuring that risks are minimized, and making sure the study is just and fair. Thyer (2010) explained that one

way to achieve ethics in a study is to provide the participants with a consent form. Each participant was given an informed consent form (Appendix E) via e-mail and in person prior to the interview. The consent form contained information regarding protection of confidentiality, the possible risks, and the benefits of participating in this study. The researcher was properly trained on how to protect the human subjects of this study and was provided with a certificate of completion from the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research (Appendix F). Moreover, Thyer (2010) explained that the ethics of the study are met by a review board. The researcher was approved by Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) for meeting the requirements of the protection of human subjects through the submission of an application for thorough review (Appendix G). Moreover, the research was granted approval from each institution's Institutional Review Board (Appendix H). Furthermore, before participation in the study, each individual was provided with a copy of the Bill of Rights document (Appendix I).

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative research involves collecting data through various sources such as interviews, observations, and artifacts. The data collected for this study occurred through semistructured interviews of six African American male student athletes and six African American male student nonathletes who were enrolled at COS, FCC, and MCC at the time of this study. The participants were recruited through purposive and purposeful random sampling. The researcher had a relationship with a few of the participants, and the others were referred to her. All of the participants received a copy of the interview questions (Appendix C). Each individual selected a time, date, and location to be

interviewed. During the interview, they were asked open-ended questions. The participants answered demographic questions first followed by answering nine questions and probing questions regarding their lived experience as either an African American male student athletes or African American male student nonathletes at COS, FCC, and MCC. Each interview was conducted face-to-face and lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. Before participating in the interview, each individual was provided an informed consent form (Appendix E) and consented to be recorded. Following the transcription of the interviews, each participant was e-mailed a copy of his answers. The participants were able to add any additional information that would highlight their lived experiences.

### **Data Analysis**

The data for this study was analyzed through different coding techniques. Given (2008) stated, “In qualitative research, discussions of coding most often center on the inductive process of searching for concepts, ideas, themes, and categories that help the researcher to organize and interpret data” (p. 85). The data were examined several times, and this allowed the researcher to circle like terms and phrases that were provided by all of the participants. The data were coded and furthered examined through the NVivo 12 computer software program to specify themes, patterns, and categories to present information in the findings section of this study. Given (2008) explained,

Coding consists of identifying potentially interesting events, features, phrases, behaviors, or stages of a process and distinguishing them with labels. These are then further differentiated or integrated so that they may be reworked into a smaller number of categories, relationships, and patterns so as to tell a story or communicate conclusions drawn from the data. (p. 85)

The researcher also utilized intercoder reliability to code the data in a consistent manner (Given, 2008). During the initial stages of coding the data, the researcher labeled concepts and put them into categories, a procedure that is known as open coding (Given, 2008). The data were also analyzed through axial coding in which the researcher honed in and refined the categories in-depth (Given, 2008). Intercoder reliability was also used to code the data of this study. Given (2008) described, “To achieve intercoder reliability, the two (or more) coders get together after the first round of independent coding to discuss their results” (p. 445). An expert who has a doctoral degree and experience with providing services to students at the community college level provided an analysis of the data by transcribing one transcript from this study. Following the transcription of these data, both the researcher and the expert’s data were compared to determine the consistency of the frequency counts.

### **Limitations**

There were a few limitations included in this study. First, the researcher was the instrument of the study. Additionally, this study explored the experiences of African American males at the community college level. Also, the sample size of the study was limited to 12 participants, and that could minimize this study’s generalizability. Moreover, the selection of participants was limited to individuals who were athletes and nonathletes. The final limitation of this study focused on individuals who were enrolled at COS, FCC, and MCC.

### **Summary**

This chapter began with a restatement of the study’s purpose and research questions. The methodology, population, sampling frame, instrumentation, validity, and

reliability were thoroughly outlined throughout this chapter. The data collection methods, analysis of data, and limitations were described. The findings of this study are found in Chapter IV.



## CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Chapter IV includes an analysis of the data collected from the interviews of the 12 participants who were African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes. This chapter opens with a reassertion of the purpose of the study, research questions, methodology, population, and sample. Also included in this chapter is the data, the themes and patterns that emerged from the participant interviews to answer each research question that is organized in tables followed by a narrative from each participant.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and differences between African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What are the lived experiences of African American male student athletes at California community colleges?
2. What are the lived experiences of African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges?
3. How do the lived experiences of African American male student athletes differ from African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges?

### **Methodology**

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of African American male student athletes and African American male

student nonathletes. Qualitative inquiry is an exploration of how individuals make sense of their experiences (Patton, 2015). Phenomenology examines the human experiences of individuals. Moreover, Given (2008) stated, “Phenomenography is thus about the description of things as they appear to us” (p. 611). Thus, this study sought to investigate how African American males (athletes and nonathletes) experience California community college. All the participants were asked demographic questions before the interview to gain a better understanding of their experiences. The African American male student athletes were asked 15 demographic questions, and the African American male student nonathletes were asked 14 demographic questions. The student athletes were asked 14 interview questions, and the student nonathletes were asked 13 interview questions and probing questions that were aligned to research questions presented in Table 5. Research Question 1 asked about the lived experiences of African American male student athletes whereas Research Question 2 asked about the lived experiences of African American male student nonathletes, followed by Research Question 3, which asked about the difference in experiences of the two groups of individuals.

All participants were recruited through purposeful sampling. These participants were selected because they met the criteria of the study. The male student athletes were recruited through the utilization of a flyer (Appendix A) that was posted in the locker room by football coaches. Each football coach assisted with recruiting participants for this study. The coaches selected five sophomores at each college who had successfully completed two semesters. The student athletes contacted the researcher with an interest of participating in the study and were e-mailed the demographic questionnaire.

Participants who answered all the demographic questions were selected to partake in the study.

Table 5

*Alignment of Research Questions*

Research question	Corresponding interview questions student—athletes	Corresponding interview questions—student nonathletes
1. What are the lived experiences of African American male student athletes at California community colleges?	Questions 1-14	
2. What are the lived experiences of African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges?		Questions 1-13
3. How do the lived experiences of African American male student athletes differ from African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges?	Questions 1-14	Questions 1-13

The male student nonathletes were recruited through a separate flyer (Appendix A) that was passed out through an African American male initiative meeting by the program’s coordinator. In addition, the flyer was posted in the gym by the men’s and women’s basketball coaches to recruit additional participants for the study. There were 30 participants who showed interest in the study and contacted the researcher via e-mail or by phone. Participants who met the criteria of the study were selected to partake in

this study. Additionally, individuals who answered all the demographic questions were selected to participate in this study.

Random purposive sampling was utilized to increase the generalizations of this study (Given, 2008). The purposive random sampling method was used to recruit African American male student athletes who were football players. The random sampling technique allowed the researcher to recruit 45 participants and then randomly select 12 who met the criteria of the study. The criteria included male football players who were sophomores, who played two seasons of football, and who were academically eligible.

There were six African American male student athletes who were football players and six African American male student nonathletes who met the criteria and who answered all of the demographic questions and were selected to participate in the study. All of the individuals were interviewed face-to-face. Before scheduling the interview, the participants were e-mailed the informed consent form (Appendix E) and the Bill of Rights document (Appendix I). The consent form contained the purpose and benefit of the study as well as the confidentiality measures that the researcher takes to protect the human subjects. The Bill of Rights document informed participants of their rights for partaking in the study including the right to receive the consent form, withdraw from the study and contact, and the right to safety for participating in the study. Additionally, the researcher was granted approval (Appendix H) by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB). The BUIRB ensured that this study protected the rights of the human subjects, that they were free from harm, that the study was ethical, and that it complied with all guidelines and regulations. Each participant selected a time, date, and

location to be interviewed. Prior to his interview, each participant granted the researcher permission to record the interview on a password protected iPhone by signing the informed consent form (Appendix E).

All interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Each participant was e-mailed a copy of his transcript. Participants were encouraged to make any necessary changes, which were added to the data. Each interview was coded through open and axial coding and then transcribed through the NVivo 12 computer software program for further analysis. The data were then merged into themes and patterns to answer the research questions of this study.

### **Profile of the College of the Sequoias, Fresno City College, and Merced Community College**

The College of the Sequoias (COS), Fresno City College (FCC), and Merced Community (MCC) are all in the Central Valley in California. These colleges were selected because of their larger enrollment of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes and the proximity of their location to the researcher.

#### **College of the Sequoias**

COS is located in Visalia, California in Tulare County. The California Community College's (2018) database reported that the total student enrollment consisted of 15,847 individuals. The ethnic breakdown included 2.6% African American, 0.5% American Indian, 2.8% Asian, 1% Filipino, 65.1% Hispanic, 0.1% Pacific Islander, 23% White, 2.9% two or more ethnicities, and 2% ethnicity unknown. Gender enrollment consisted of 56.3% female, 42.5% male, and 1.2% unknown. The persistence rate at this college is 73.9% for all students combined and 75.9% for African American students.

The degree transfer rate for all students at this college is 43.6% and 55.6% for African American students. The college has eight men's sports and 10 women's sports.

### **Fresno City College**

FCC is located in Fresno, California in Fresno County. The California Community College's (2018) database reported that the total student enrollment consisted of 34,545 individuals. The ethnic breakdown consisted of 5.5% African American, 0.5% American Indian/Alaska Native, 11.8% Asian, 1.0% Filipino, 54.9% Hispanic, 0.2% Pacific Islander, 22.5% White, 2.7% two or more ethnicities, and 0.9% ethnicity unknown. Gender enrollment consisted of 51.2% female, 47.3% male, and 1.5% unknown. The persistence rate at this college is 78.7% for all students combined and 73.4% for African American students. The degree transfer rate for all students at this college is 41.4% and 24.3% for African American students. The college has nine men's sports and 12 women's sports.

### **Merced Community College**

MCC is located in Merced, California in Merced County. The California Community College's (2018) database reported that the total student enrollment consisted of 15,378 individuals. The ethnic breakdown consisted of 3.4% African American, 0.4% American Indian/Alaska Native, 9.2% Asian, 0.9% Filipino, 58.9% Hispanic, 0.4% Pacific Islander, 22.5%, White, 2.8% two or more ethnicities, and 1.5% ethnicity unknown. Gender enrollment consisted of 58.2% female, 40.8% male, and 0.9% unknown. The persistence rate at this college is 74.0% for all students combined and 71.2% for African American students. The degree transfer rate for all students at this

college is 38.8% and 32.2% for African American students. The college has six men's sports and six women's sports.

### **Population/Sample**

There are 115 community colleges in California. There are over 2.1 million students in attendance within these colleges. These colleges also have multiple athletic programs for both men and women (CCCCO, 2018). Student athletes and student nonathletes who are enrolled throughout the 115 California community colleges are the population of this study. According to Cal-Pass Plus (2018) there were 22,354 student athletes and 1,974,716 student nonathletes enrolled at all 115 California community colleges statewide in the 2017-2018 academic year. There were 14,544 male student athletes and 7,805 women student athletes. African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes who were enrolled at COS, FCC, and MCC comprised the target population as a subset of the population (Daniel, 2011). According to Cal-Pass Plus (2019b) in 2017-2018 academic year, there were 3,636 (2.8%) African American student athletes and 126,649 (97.2%) African American student nonathletes enrolled statewide throughout the California community college system.

At COS, there were 97 (1.1%) female student athletes, 182 (2.7%) male student athletes, 8,883 (98.9%) female student nonathletes, and 6,507 (97.3%) male student nonathletes enrolled in the 2017-2018 academic year (Cal-Pass Plus, 2019b). Additionally, there were 54 (12.9%) African American male student athletes and 363 (87.1%) African American male student nonathletes enrolled at COS, 58 (2.9%). At FCC, there were 119 (0.6%) female student athletes, 237 (1.4%) male student athletes, 19,315 (99.4%) female student nonathletes, and 16,960 (98.6%) male student nonathletes

enrolled in the 2017-2018 academic year (Cal-Pass Plus, 2019b). Additionally, there were 58 (2.9%) African American male student athletes and 1,948 (97.1%) African American student nonathletes enrolled at FCC. At MCC, there were 64 (0.7%) female student athletes, 139 (2.3%) male student athletes, 8,988 (99.3%) female student nonathletes, and 5,890 (97.7%) male student nonathletes enrolled in the 2017-2018 academic year (Cal-Pass Plus, 2019b). In addition, there were 32 (6.2%) African American male student athletes and 483 (93.8%) African American student nonathletes enrolled at MCC during the 2017-2018 academic year. Therefore, each academic year at COS, FCC, and MCC, there are a combined 144 (4.9%) African American male student athletes and 2,794 (95.1%) African American student nonathletes enrolled (Cal-Pass Plus, 2019b) who are included in the purposive sample of this study.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained that sample of a study includes a “group of individuals from whom data are collected” (p. 129). There were 12 participants who were selected as the sample of this study, including six African American male student athletes and six African American student nonathletes enrolled who were currently enrolled at COS, FCC, and MCC. Purposeful and random purposeful sampling were used to recruit participants for this study. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select participants who meet the criteria of the study (Daniel, 2011). Random purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select individuals who can increase the generalizations of the larger population of the study (Given, 2008). The purposeful and random purposeful sampling included 12 individuals who met the following criteria of the study:



- African American
- Male
- Student football athlete who played two seasons
- Student nonathlete
- Completed at least 1 year
- Enrolled at COS, FCC, and MCC
- Consented to participate in this study.

In qualitative studies, Creswell (2013) indicated that for grounded theory methods, there must be 20 to 30 participants to capture extensive detailed data about the phenomena. Dukes (1984) specified that in phenomenological studies, there is a need for only 10 participants. Riemen (1986) suggested that qualitative studies include up to 10 participants. There were 12 participants who were selected to partake in this study because they filled out all the demographic questions that they were sent.

### **Interviews and Interview Process**

The interviews with all participants were conducted from February-March 2020. Interviews with the African American male student athletes were conducted on a weekday after practice, and interviews were conducted with the African American male student nonathletes on a day that was conducive to their availability. Upon receiving the demographic questionnaire from the African American male student athletes, the researcher contacted the football coach to schedule a date, time, and location to conduct the interviews. Once this information was provided to the researcher, she contacted the participants, and they agreed to meet on the scheduled date, times, and location. Upon receiving the demographic questionnaire from the African American male student

nonathletes, the researcher contacted them, and they provided her with a date, time, and location that best suited their availability.

The interviews with the African American male student athletes took place in a study hall building, where the researcher was provided an office at each college to speak with each participant individually. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, and they lasted 40 to 46 minutes each. Before conducting each interview with the African American male student athletes, they signed an informed consent form (Appendix E) and granted the researcher permission to record the interview. The participants were provided an additional copy of the Bill of Rights document (Appendix I). The interviews with the African American male student nonathletes took place at a location of their choice where they felt safe and free to share about their experiences. There were four interviews that took place at Starbucks and two interviews that took place at restaurants. The interviews were face-to-face and lasted approximately 43 minutes each. The African American male student nonathletes signed an informed consent form (Appendix E) prior to participating in the interview and granted the researcher permission to record their interview. An additional copy of the Bill of Rights document (Appendix I) was given to each participant.

### **Demographic Data**

The participants answered demographic questions for this qualitative study. Each participant met the characteristics that are outlined in Table 6.

The participants had an average age of 19.9 years. There was one participant in his mid-20s. The average GPA of the student athletes was 2.74, and the average GPA of the student nonathletes was 2.47. Overall, the athletes were performing better

Table 6

*Demographic Data of Participants*

Pseudonym	Age	College	Year	Status	GPA	Educational goal	Parents attended college
Khari	19	COS	2nd year	Athlete	2.6	Bachelor's	Mom-Yes Dad-Yes
Kaya	25	COS	2nd year	Athlete	3.2	Bachelor's	Mom-No Dad-No
Amir	20	COS	2nd year	Non athlete	2.7	Bachelor's	Mom-Yes Dad-No
Nassir	20	COS	2nd year	Non athlete	2.4	Bachelor's	Mom-No Dad-No
Ziaire	19	FCC	2nd year	Athlete	2.6	Bachelor's	Mom-Yes Dad-No
Rajj	20	FCC	2nd year	Athlete	2.4	Bachelor's	Mom-No Dad-No
Maliki	20	FCC	2nd year	Non athlete	2.7	Bachelor's	Mom-No Dad-No
Hasan	19	FCC	2nd year	Non athlete	2.2	Bachelor's	Mom-No Dad-No
Kamil	19	MCC	2nd year	Athlete	2.5	Master's	Mom-No Dad-No
Tarik	19	MCC	2nd year	Athlete	3.17	Bachelor's	Mom-Bachelor's Dad-No
Nizam	19	MCC	2nd year	Non athlete	3.0	Bachelor's	Mom-AA degree Dad-No
Zuhri	20	MCC	2nd year	Non athlete	1.87	Bachelor's	Mom-In college Dad-No

academically than nonathletes. All the participants had a desire to complete a bachelor's degree with one participant having a desire to obtain a master's degree. There were five

participants who had parents who attended college. There was only one participant who had a parent who had received a bachelor's degree.

### **Presentation of the Data by Themes**

There were differences in responses among African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes regarding their experiences at their California community college. African American male student athletes experienced more challenges because of being athletes; had more social support from their coaches, teammates, and their friends; and utilized the student labs and support centers more than the African American male student nonathletes. The athletes also experienced fewer academic struggles, a fact that is evident from the differences in the GPAs. African American male student nonathletes had more support from being in on-campus programs and received the majority of their social support from friends, program faculty and staff, counselors, and advisors compared to the African American male student athletes. Table 7 includes the frequency of the participants' responses regarding the difference in their experiences. Academic supports include things such as "Remedial courses; tutoring, study groups; supplemental instruction; and summer bridge programs" (Tinto, 2012, p. 25). Social supports include things such as mentoring, friendships, informal relationships with faculty and staff, and participating in extracurricular activities (Tinto, 1993, 2012). According to Tinto's (1993, 2012) definition of academic and social supports, Research Question 3 included merging the academic and social supports that were indicated by the participants in Research Questions 1 and 2 to provide a better understanding of the types of supports that were accessed.

Table 7

*The Differences in Responses Among African American Male Student Athletes and African American Student Nonathletes at Community Colleges*

Theme	Student athletes		Student nonathletes	
	Respondents	Frequency	Respondents	Frequency
A. The struggle is real	6	60	6	55
B. Social supports are needed	6	29	6	22
C. We all we got	6	15	6	12
D. Informal faculty and staff relationships are important	6	14	4	10
E. Academic supports are important	6	11	4	14
F. Academic supports are needed	6	11	4	14
G. Financial support is a must	6	7	5	9
H. I wanted better for myself	4	4	6	9
I. The coursework is difficult	2	2	4	9
J. Financial challenges	6	9	3	5
K. Being a Black athlete is a challenge	6	26		

### **A. The Struggle is Real**

This theme was referenced 51 times among all the African American male student athlete participants. The participants expressed societal athletic, academic, and personal struggles while growing up Black, being a male, being an athlete, and attending community college. A few of the participants expressed the roughness of growing up Black. Kamil explained, “I can understand it going to be rough but the path for Black men is totally different than any other race. It’s 10 times harder than any other race.”

Ziaire indicated, “It’s rough growing up a Black man. It’s nerve-wrecking all the time. It’s just not fair.” Khari highlighted, “Being African American male is like playing a video game on the highest difficulty, but the incentive to that is in the end once you get your goals accomplished you know nothing can stop you.” Some of the participants specified that they had to endure stereotypical attitudes from others. Kamil stated, “We always get stereotyped. The things that we say, the things that we wear, our culture—they [White people] are always looking at us.” Kaya explained,

It’s always what did you do rather than how you are doing. It’s always a struggle. That’s the reality of being Black. Everyone has a stereotype towards us. You don’t know a person until you speak to them. I can’t say every White person is racist, but they already have a story about the Black male.

The participants unanimously indicated they endure struggles with being an athlete. Kamil stated, “Being an athlete is a challenge because I don’t have a lot of time to do anything besides practice, go to work study, and do my homework. You have to keep up with everything or you will fail.” Ziaire added, “They don’t understand that I play football, work 29 hours a week, and take 15 units. I need professors who actually want to help students.” One participant expressed encountering challenges with professors simply because of his student athlete status. Rajj explained,

A lot of our professors are negative and do not see me as a student. They see me as an athlete that been getting by which irritates me because they don’t know my story and what I have been through.

The participants indicated that they’ve endured academic struggles on their campuses from not being prepared in high school. Rajj stated, “Everyone just thinks that

we are lazy and that we want handouts. I was not prepared in high school, so the coursework is a little difficult for me. I really can't wait to leave this school." Ziaire indicated, "Teachers not willing to help, just giving test with not really teaching the subject, teachers emphasizing that all athletes just get free passes."

Each participant acknowledged that they have struggled at their colleges as a Black male athlete. One participant spoke about experiencing difficulties with a lack of resources. Kamil stated, "It has been difficult. There are not enough resources at this college. It's hard living with the little money that I get, so I have to make it work."

Another participant shared the difficulties with not having enough food. Tarik explained,

Were athletes and we have to eat more than the average student because we burn more calories a day. It's just a struggle. It's rough. I find myself; all my money goes to food and rent. At the end, I still don't have enough money to buy food. I go through my food like crazy. Money is difficult. When you have to focus on that and school, it's just a struggle.

The participants expressed the difficulties with being an athlete. Ziaire explained,

No one understands our struggle; we work a lot harder than the general students.

Teachers believe that we just skate by and aren't trying, which isn't true; we can't be here past five semesters or our career is pretty much over.

Kaya added, "They have a whole different demeanor towards us. When you lose, they don't like you too much either. Really the biggest challenge that I've had with being an athlete is being a target."

This theme was referenced 55 times among all of the African American male student nonathlete participants. The participants unanimously indicated that being a Black male is “rough and tough.” Amir stated,

Living as an African American male can be tough at moments. People already have the mindset that we are not able to achieve anything, or that we are up to no good. I feel like, if I don’t make it, I won’t have a chance at a good life. It’s a struggle.

Nassir pointed out,

I don’t know why life has to be so rough for Black men. I mean what did we do? Be born Black? Is that such a crime? Life is not fair to Black men. I have always struggled. My Black friends have always struggled. My family members have done nothing but struggled. It’s like it’s never going to end. That’s why I came to college. I don’t want to struggle anymore.

Nizam’s experience was similar to that of Azar of growing up around gangs and community violence. Nizam indicated,

It was kind of rough. It was a hard experience growing up where I was. Where I come from, you’re either hustling, playing sports, or trying do something to get by like selling drugs. I’ve seen it all. Deaths in front of me. I did surround myself by negative people, but I was a kid that stayed on the positive side.

A few participants expressed their struggles and challenges with being an African American male on their campuses. Hasan indicated,

It’s difficult everyone sees us a threat and we are treated as such. Walking on campus, the students and professors avoid you out of fear. We are not even a



threat. We are here to get our education just like everyone else. So far it has been a horrible experience. I have thought about dropping out and just getting a job.

Maliki added,

This past semester I encountered an extremely difficulty. The work was hard. I had a math professor that never taught just talked and passed out a test every 2 weeks. You will feel that no one on this campus wants to see you succeed but you have to keep pushing. It's hard for us on this campus just like any other campus.

Zuhri specified,

As for college, I can go in the classroom and you can be the only Black kid. I stand out. There's not a lot of Black people here, and definitely not a lot of Black professors. It's hard because I feel some of the teachers don't like me because I'm Black. I haven't done anything; I'm just Black.

A few of the participants spoke about academic struggles. Amir stated, "You have to fight harder than most for what you want. When you don't understand the work, some people are not willing to help. It's a lot of work so you have to make the time for it." Nassir noted,

I was not prepared for the work in college. I feel like some of my high school teachers failed me. I hate asking people for help, so it was hard for me to ask my professors for help. I just tried to figure out the work the best that I could. When I couldn't understand it, I asked my advisor or a family member. I was too prideful to ask for help.

A couple of the participants expressed that their college experience has been stressful. Hasan stated, “It’s already rough being an African American male. So far college has been very stressful. It’s been rough.” Maliki added, “It’s hard for us African American’s already so I don’t understand why they [teachers] have to make it more stressful. It’s not right.” A couple of the participants shared their struggles with finances. Nizam explained,

I be so worried about how I’m going to provide for myself. It can be the middle of the month and I don’t have nothing. Sometimes I don’t know what to do. But when I see that deposit from my work study it gets me happy.

Zuhri added,

I did have financial aid; however, I don’t get it no more. It’s a struggle paying for college. I’m doing whatever I can to pay for college. I’m grateful that it doesn’t cost much to go to a community college, or I would have been dropped out.

## **B. Social Supports are Needed**

This theme was referenced 29 times by each of the African American male student athlete participants. The participants expressed gratitude for having support from their coaches and teammates. Kamil stated, “My boys [teammates] have been really supportive. I couldn’t do this without them.” Kaya stated, “Our coaches talk to us every week about being careful about what we do and say. I appreciate them for that.” Khari indicated, “My teammates have been a big help to me. I appreciate all that they have done for me. I wouldn’t have made it without them.” Tarik added, “Coach has been a big help with everything. Without guys like this I wouldn’t be here right now. I guess I

would just be working a regular job trying to get it on my own.” Ziaire indicated, “My teammates have been beneficial. I appreciate all their support.”

There were 22 responses to this theme made all six African American male student nonathlete participants. The participants expressed appreciation for the support they received from these programs. Nassir pointed out, “The A2mend program has saved my life and appreciate all of the support that I have received from brotherhood!” Maliki added, “The Symbaa program has been my biggest support. I appreciate all the love they have shown to me.” Amir stated, “I appreciate all the support I received from my friends. They have been really helpful.”

This theme was referenced 51 times among all the participants. Some of the participants expressed that the social support they received from their coaches and teammates was most beneficial. Rajj stated, “They [teammates] have come through for me a lot. I have been able to make it through with their support. Without them, I don’t know what I would do.” Tarik added, “Without the coaches and peers, I don’t think I would be able to make it. Without them I would have dropped out.” Ziaire pointed out, “Coaches keeping me motivated has been beneficial through my first semester. My teammates have been there for me. They keep me focused.” Kamil expressed, “A few of the teammates have been beneficial. My boys, I’m with them every day.” A few of the participants specified that the programs were beneficial to their collegiate experience. Nassir noted,

The A2mend program has allowed me to create a brotherhood with other Black men who have similar experiences as me. I have gained so much knowledge and

support from this program and it has made me a better person. I don't know what I would do without my mentors and friends that I made in this program.

Maliki added, "I have gained mentors through the Symbaa program. They have been here for me and I appreciate them." A few of the participants expressed their appreciation for the support they received from their counselors and advisors. Nizam explained, "The counselors have made my social experience a little better. It's nice to go in and talk to them sometimes about the roughness of college. I appreciate them." Zuhri noted, "Student Support Services have counselors there that you can talk to whenever you are in need."

### **C. We all we got**

There were 15 references made to this theme among all the African American male student athlete participants. The participants expressed that they would not have come this far without the support from the friends they made on the football field. Kamil explained,

I'm with them every day. I'm not from here so I really don't know anyone else besides the football guys. A few of them have become my friend. My circle is small, and I don't trust everyone, so I appreciate the support that I receive from them. Without them I probably would not have stayed. We support each other. We got each other's back.

Tarik added,

My teammates have been helpful. Having friends makes you feel more comfortable than other dudes on the team that are going through what I am going through. Strong relationships are built off that. We all know what we are going

through, and we all have been through some tough times. We are here for each other. I'm glad that I have them.

A few participants indicated that they would not be able to make it without the support of their friends. Ziaire pointed out,

My teammates . . . have been huge for me especially now with season starting. I wouldn't be able to make it through without them. They are very supportive to me. They have been here for me and they help keep me focused. We need each other to get by.

Rajj stated, "My teammates have been a big help to me through all my up and down times. I really appreciate their support. We all we got." One participant explained that the friendships that he has made from playing football will last a lifetime. Kaya stated,

These dudes are my guys. They have been here for me and I have been here for them. I wouldn't have been able to make it without them. We support each other on and off the field. The relationships that we have built are unbreakable. We are family now. We all we got.

One participant expressed great appreciation for the support of his teammates. Khari stated, "They have been here for me since day one, and I appreciate them."

Each participant indicated that they needed social support from their friends and teammates throughout their collegiate journey. Kamil stated, "I wouldn't made it this far without my friends. We all we got." Ziaire explained, "My friends have been the most beneficial social support. Without them I wouldn't have been able to do this. We all we got." Khari added, "My guys have been the most beneficial social support. I swear without them I would have dropped out already. We need each other."

This theme was referenced 12 times among all six of the African American male student nonathlete participants. The participants indicated that they made friends and were able to make it through because of the support they received. Maliki explained,

The Symbaa program is a brotherhood. . . . We all push and help each other stay on track. I need more programs like Symbaa so men that look like me won't continue to fall through the cracks. We all we got.

Nizam indicated,

My boys are my biggest support. They will always have my back. That's important. My friends are real good people. My friends have been beneficial to me. Knowing someone always got my back with food and rides. We all we got.

One participant expressed his gratitude for having supportive friends. Zuhri specified,

My friends they help me out a lot. They always make sure that I'm on my stuff. They get on me and make sure that I do my schoolwork. They tell me to go to class. I'm thankful for my friends. Without them, I don't think I would even be here. We all we got.

The participants expressed the importance of the social support they received from their friends throughout college. Hasan added, "My friends have been a big help. Sometimes I just want to drop out of college and get a job but they push me to keep going because they know I want a degree. We all we got." Amir added, "I'm glad I have my friends because college is hard. They have been there for me through it all." Nassir indicated, "My boys have been my biggest help. We are a brotherhood. We all we got."

#### **D. Informal Faculty and Staff Relationships are Important**

This theme was referenced 14 times among all the African American male student athlete participants. The participants expressed deep gratitude for their coaches and acknowledged that they would not have been able to make it without their help. Kaya stated, “The coaches have been a big support. . . . They believed in me and pushed me to become my best.” Khari added, “The coaches’ support has been most beneficial. They are here for me and I appreciate all that they do for me.” One participant pointed out that his coach became a mentor to him. Kamil indicated,

The coaches mentor us. He sits down and talks to us. The stuff in life we already should know like right from wrong he sits down and talks to us. He told me stuff that I think he didn’t know that I was doing.

One participant expressed appreciation for the coaches receiving him with open arms. Kaya stated, “I appreciate them for what they did. They gave me an opportunity and a second chance. I appreciate all of the support that I have received from my . . . I am grateful for the opportunity.” A few of the participants explained that their coach’s “lookout” for them when they need transportation and food. Ziaire indicated, “The coaches are a big help. They have gone out of their way to pick us up for class and they have shown us love. I appreciate that.”

Tarik stated,

Coach has been a big help. He is always there when I need him. When I’m hungry he points me in the right direction. When I need rides, he comes and picks me up. He is always looking out for me.

Mostly, all the participants are thankful for the support that they have received from their coaching staff. Rajj stated, “I would not have made it this far without the coaches. I know that they have my back. I appreciate them for looking out for me.”

All the African American male student athletes indicated that their coaches are supportive. Kamil stated, “The coaches have our back. They have been really supportive. I couldn’t make it without their support.” Kaya added, “My coach has been very supportive. . . . I don’t know what I would do without him.” Khari noted, “The coaches care about me and that means a lot. I wouldn’t have made it this far without their support.” Tarik explained, “When I need something, the coaches are here for me. They have been a huge support.” Ziaire expressed that the coaches have been helpful throughout his two seasons of football. He stated, “They have been here for me since day one. I appreciate everything that they have done for me.”

This theme was referenced 10 times among four out of the six African American male student nonathlete participants. The participants expressed their appreciation for being involved in on-campus programs. Maliki stated, “I have been blessed to be a part of the Symbaa Program at FCC. If I wasn’t in this program, I’m sure it would be difficult for me.” Nassir explained,

A2mend is one of the best things that ever happened to me at COS. Usually only Black men come here to play football because there’s nothing out here. I came here because I heard they had a program for Black males, and I wanted to be a part of that. I didn’t have role models while I was growing up and I needed that in my life. The mentors in this program have really helped me and I appreciate them for that.



A few of the participants explained that their program faculty and staff were beneficial. Zuhri stated, “I appreciate the DSPS staff. They really helped me out a lot. I have to say that they were my most beneficial social support.” Amir added, “The DSPS faculty and staff have provided me with a lot of support, and I appreciate all of their help.” The participants expressed their appreciation of the help they received from faculty and staff. Zuhri highlighted, “The student support services building is very helpful. They help me get the resources I need. I couldn’t have made it this far without them.” Amir stated, “The counselors are there for us to talk to any time throughout the day. I appreciate that.” Nassir added, “My advisor was very helpful. I was able to depend on her whenever I needed help.”

#### **E. Academic Supports are Important**

This theme was referenced 11 times among all the African American male student athlete participants. One participant explained that he needed the support from tutors because he had difficulty with understanding his professors. Kamil pointed out,

The tutorial building has been the most beneficial academic support. There’s a lady tutor in there and she’s smart. She know everything. The way she helps you she doesn’t just tell you the answers. She puts it in a way to make you understand. The professors, they don’t teach you like they are supposed to. They think that you are just supposed to understand everything because you are in college. But I don’t, so the tutoring has helped me a lot.

A few of the participants specified the importance of having access to tutors. Tarik stated, “Study central has been helpful. They have tutors in there. They help me with

assignments that I do not understand.” Ziaire added, “The tutorial center has been a big help. The tutors are good, and they help me understand the work.”

Kaya pointed out,

We go in the student success building so that we can get laptops to do our work.

They also have tutors in there, which has been very helpful. I have received help for my geography class because it was difficult. I appreciate the help of the tutors.

Some of the participants specified the necessity of having tutors. Rajj stated, “We need tutors because the work is difficult. Without them we would not be able to understand what we are doing.” Khari added, “Yeah the tutors help us out a lot. The professors think we understand all of the work, but we don’t. I appreciate the help that I receive from the tutors.” A few of the participants expressed that they get to bond with their teammates while they are in the labs. Kaya stated, “My boys are in there [study hall] so it makes it a little better.” Kamil added, “We [teammates] get to hang out with each other during study hall, which makes the time go by faster.” A couple of the participants indicated that their friends have been the most beneficial social support that they have received while attending college.

Each participant indicated that the tutors were necessary and helped them better understand their assignments. Kamil explained, “The tutors help you with your papers. When you don’t understand something in class you get to go to the lab and they help you catch up on your work.” Kaya stated,

The student success building is a good place to go to get help with your work.

We go in there and get laptops. They have tutors for us. Everything you need for being an athlete is in that building. The tutors have been beneficial.

Tarik added, “Study central allows me to communicate with my teammates and we help each other stay on top of things. The tutors in there have been helpful and they help me understand my work.” The participants explained that they received meaningful help from the student labs and support centers. Kamil stated, “I appreciate the help that I got from the tutoring lab. I am thankful for study central. Without it I wouldn’t be able to understand my assignments.” Kaya stated, “I used the student success building. We go in there and do our homework. It’s primary for the athletes. I appreciate the help.” Rajj expressed, “I have accessed the tutoring centers which have been helpful.”

This theme was referenced 14 times among four of the six African American male student nonathlete participants. Two participants were classified as having a disability and indicated that they received services through the disabled students program services (DSPS), which helped them academically. Amir stated,

The DSPS program is a good program for students who struggle academically. I can get the help I need when I go in there. They allow me extra time to take quizzes and tests because I do not understand the teachers all the time.

Zuhri added,

The DSPS is a place where you can go in there if you have a test you can get an extra hour on the quiz. The DSPS program has been beneficial because you get more time to go over the questions. Sometimes you may not understand, and it takes you longer.

One participant explained that although he didn't utilize academic supports as much as he should have, the tutoring lab allowed him to understand his assignments. Hasan explained, "Yeah, I didn't get much academic help, but the tutoring lab was a good support when I did go."

The participants explained that they wouldn't have been able to make it through college without the assistance from on-campus programs. Amir stated, "The DSPS is the reason why I will finish my degree. It has been very helpful." Nassir explained,

The A2mend program taught me a lot about myself. I certainly have grown into a man. I didn't know how to be a man, and they taught me how to be one. I promise I'm a better person for being in this program. I wouldn't have made it without them.

Maliki added, "The Symbaa program has helped prepare me for college. I am more confident because of their assistance. I would have dropped out if it wasn't for this program."

There were four out of the six African American male student nonathletes who made 14 references to this theme. The participants indicated that they needed academic supports from on-campus programs. Zuhri explained, "The student support services have helped me out a lot. I appreciate all of their help." Malik stated, "I'm most appreciative for my advisor. She really helped me out academically. I was able to receive tutoring, and it really helped me." Amir added, "The most beneficial academic support I had at this school was the DSPS Program. I am able to graduate because of their support."

## **F. Academic Supports are Needed**

There were 25 references to the theme that were made by eight out of the 12 participants. A few of the participants expressed that the labs were valuable for receiving help with their assignments. Kamil stated, “I go in the tutoring lab because I get my work done there. I can’t do it at home because I get distracted. Plus, we are required to go.” Tarik added, “The tutoring labs help me because it’s quiet in there and I can get my work done.” Khari expressed,

The student success center let you print papers for free. I also go to the center for study hall. Being at home is hard for me to study so I need to put myself in a situation to study. That’s why I go to the student success center and we are required to go twice a week.

Kaya explained,

I go in the study lab because there is peace and quiet in there. There are also tutors that help me while I’m in there. There are other resources such as rooms, printing, and food you can access while you’re in there. We are required to go in there and get help with our work. I think it’s good that the coaches require us to go. That way we can get the help we need and not have to be stressed with all the other stuff going on.

Two participants spoke about the importance of having extra support because of their disability. Zuhri explained, “The DSPS program has been beneficial because you get more time to go over the questions. I don’t understand the work all of the time, so I’m grateful for the extra help.” Amir stated, “I am grateful for the DSPS. I appreciate all of their support.” One participant expressed gratitude for the academic help he received

from his counselor and advisor. Maliki added, “My advisors and counselors have been very beneficial with helping me throughout my college experience. I appreciate them.”

### **G. Financial Support is a Must**

There were seven references made to this theme among all the African American male student athlete participants. The participants explained the necessity of having financial aid. Kamil stated, “I need work study to pay my bills. Without it, I wouldn’t be able to afford to live. I need every bit of it and then some.” Khari added, “All I get is financial aid so that is a benefit. I would not be able to pay for school without it. I need it and it has helped so much.” A few of the participants pointed out that they would not have been able to pay for college without having received financial aid. Kaya stated,

Financial aid has helped me pay my way through school. I wouldn’t be able to afford school with the financial support from the college. All football players need financial aid to make it through college because we can’t work and we have other responsibilities.

Tarik added, “Without financial aid—hell naw. I would not be here right now. I’m not paying out of pocket. So the financial aid is a must to go to college.” Some of the participants expressed that financial aid was a major help for them. Rajj explained, “Financial aid has been a huge help. I wouldn’t be able to attend college without financial aid. I needed financial aid to get through college.” Ziaire stated, “Both financial aid and EOPS have both helped me out a lot. I need the financial support from these programs to pay for college. Without financial aid, I would not be able to afford to pay for college.”

There were nine references made to this theme among five of the six African American male student nonathlete participants. The participants indicated that they must have financial aid to “get through” college. Hasan stated, “Financial aid has been huge helping me get to school and pay for school. Without financial aid I would not be able to make it through school.” Maliki added, “Financial aid has been very beneficial. Without financial aid I would not be able to afford college. I need the financial support to achieve my goals.” One participant expressed the necessity of having a work study job due to his out-of-state status. Nizam stated,

Work study has been beneficial because I be worried about my rent so when I see the check all of my problems go away. I haven’t received my financial aid yet, but I will get it. Without the money, I would not be able to make it through college.

One participant explained that financial aid is necessary because of his low-income status. Zuhri indicated,

My family is poor, and they cannot afford to give or send me money every month. It’s hard balancing school, work, and other responsibilities. I’m glad that I got financial aid because without it, I wouldn’t be able to make it. Financial aid is definitely necessary.

Another participant specified that he needed financial aid because he has to take care of his family with his veteran benefits. Amir stated, “I’ve just been living off my financial aid and VA benefits and using that to support my family back at home. I don’t use it all for my school. I try to help out at home when I can.”

## **H. I Wanted Better for Myself**

This theme was referenced four times by four out of the six African American male student athlete participants. A few of the participants expressed that they grew up in poverty and that attending college was something they did to improve themselves. Kamil stated, “In my home state there isn’t a lot of do, so I had to play football. Although I miss home, football is my motivation to do better.” Kaya indicated, “I messed up after high school, and I wanted to get out of the situation that I was in. I’m glad I got a second chance, and I’m going to do something with this opportunity.” Khari added, “My family is not well off. . . . I wanted to get away from where I came from. . . . It was my motivation to prepare me for college.” Rajj specified, “I believe that I had no other option but to go to school to better myself and my family. Not many people I know have degrees, and I want to be one of them to accomplish that.”

This theme was referenced nine times by each African American male student nonathlete participant. The participants indicated that they wanted to get out of their bad situations and wanted better for themselves. Nassir stated,

College was my way out. There was nothing going on in my hood; especially nothing positive. I couldn’t wait to graduate high school and make a better life for myself. I’m thankful for the hood, but it’s not what I want in my future. Maliki added, “I wanted more in life. I wanted to get out of my situation, so I worked hard to get here.” Zuhri indicated, “I also wanted to go to college to get a better life. I wanted more for myself. I always knew that I would be somebody regardless of my situation.” One participant expressed that he wanted to get away from the poor conditions of his neighborhood and achieve success. Nizam explained,



I wanted better for myself. I wanted to get out of the hood. There is nothing there. No one really from the hood makes it to college. I really don't know anyone from my hood that went to college. I wanted to be better. I want to make a name for my hood. I want to make my mom proud.

Two participants expressed that they chose to attend college because they would be the first in their families to obtain a degree. Hasan pointed out,

My mom and dad didn't go to college. Not too many people that I hang around with have gone to college. I just wanted to be different. I wanted to get out of poverty. I want to be able to buy my mom nice stuff for all of her hard work taking care of me and my siblings. I want better for myself and for my family.

Amir added,

What prepared me for college is my background and seeing the people from where I came from. I know that I'm going to get a degree so I can have better opportunities in the future. Not that many people even go to college and I want to show them that I can. So, I was motivated to get out of my situation so I can be successful.

### **I. The Coursework is Difficult**

This theme was referenced 11 times by six of the 12 of participants. A couple of the participants expressed that they encountered challenges with not receiving help from their professors regarding their coursework. Kamil stated, "I didn't come to this school prepared. The teachers think you're supposed to know what you're doing. I don't understand them. I'm glad I can go to study hall." Ziaire added, "The teachers are not really willing to help, they just give out test without teaching the subjects. . . . I need

professors who actually want to help students and teach them.” There were a few participants who expressed they encountered academic challenges. Amir stated, “The biggest challenge I encountered so far is the schoolwork. It definitely gets hard at times but you have to continue pushing forward.” Nassir added, “Man the work is hard, but I am able to get through it.” A couple of the participants expressed their frustration with not being able to understand the work because of their professors. Zuhri explained, “I don’t know where they found some of these teachers at, but they can’t teach. They make understanding to work too hard. That’s why I have to get extra help from DSPS.” Hasan pointed out, “The courses that I’m taking are extremely hard. My teachers when I ask for help do not guide me at all on how to be successful in school.”

#### **J. Financial Challenges**

This theme was referenced nine times among all the African American male student athlete participants. The participants expressed the challenges with growing up in poverty and caring for their personal needs in college. Kamil stated, “Growing up I didn’t choose to live a certain way. Black people are more poor than everyone else. It’s a struggle. All the Black people that I know, their parents are low-income.” Tarik added, “Black people are more subject to poverty, and we have to live from paycheck to paycheck. We struggle more financially.” A few participants explained the challenges of having a lack of resources in college. Khari stated, “The cost of books is ridiculous. I had to go 3 weeks without books. I had to get a digital book, and so I was behind and had to make up the test.” Kamil added, “It has been difficult. There are not enough resources at this college.”

This theme was referenced five times by three out of the six African American male student nonathletes. A couple of the participants specified they grew up in low-income homes. Maliki stated, “It was hard for us [family], we grew up poor.” Nizam added, “We lived in a poor neighborhood, and my mom didn’t have much money.” One participant indicated he struggled with receiving financial aid. Azar stated, “I had to go 2 semesters without getting financial aid, so I never even received it.”

#### **L. Being a Black Athlete is a Challenge**

There were 26 responses to this theme made by all the African American male student athlete participants. The participants explained that being an athlete is a challenge. Kaya noted, “If an athlete does something wrong and a person doesn’t like athletes, you get punished for it very hard. You can tell who doesn’t like athletes.” Rajj stated, “Being Black makes it hard to be a student athlete here at Fresno City College, and I can’t wait to leave.” Tarik indicated,

Being an athlete, and then working a job and then going to school is tough.

Money is hard to come by. A lot of us are relying on our parents or financial aid and it’s not always a lot of money, so it’s hard at times.

Ziaire pointed out, “That’s stressful to think I have to hurry take these classes pass them all, work a job, pay rent, go to school full-time, then practice.”

#### **Summary**

Chapter IV included all the responses of the participant interviews regarding this study’s research questions. The 12 participants provided a descriptive narrative regarding their experiences of being African American males at their community colleges. There were six participants who were football student athletes and there were six participants

who were student nonathletes. There was a unanimous voice from among the participants that echoed their struggles of being African American males.

Research Question 1 asked about the lived experiences of African American male student athletes. The findings revealed that they struggled economically, academically, and endured stereotypes. The participants expressed their difficulties with balancing their student athlete status and keeping up with their schedules and the rigors of college. The findings also showed that they had support from their coaches and teammates, which was beneficial throughout their collegiate journeys. Student study labs and support centers were a main source of academic support, especially assistance from tutors. Research Question 2 asked about the lived experiences of African American male student nonathletes. The findings showed that they struggled with having fewer supports, experienced difficulties with coursework, and endured challenges with professors. The findings revealed that on-campus programs and supports from counselors and advisors are necessary for retention and persistence among African American male student nonathletes. Research Question 3 asked about the difference in experiences among the student athletes and the student nonathletes. The findings showed that the student athletes experienced more challenges because of being an African American athlete, they had more social support from their coaches and teammates, and there was more usage of student labs and support centers. The findings revealed that the student nonathletes need academic and social support from on-campus programs and social support from friends to persist in community college.

In conclusion, each participant in this study expressed the struggles with being an African American male. They endured hardships and stress with navigating college

because of their low-income status. Although the student athletes had more support, they still struggled with accessing necessities to care for themselves. The student nonathletes struggled resulting from not having support from faculty and staff and finances to provide for their necessities. Chapter V presents the major findings, conclusions, and implications for future research.

## CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It's no disgrace to be black, but it's often very inconvenient.

—J. W. Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*

Chapter V includes a restatement of the purpose statement, research questions, methodology, population, and sample. The major findings, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for future research are also included in this chapter. This chapter culminates with concluding remarks and the researcher's personal reflections.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and differences between African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions of this study are:

1. What are the lived experiences of African American male student athletes at California community colleges?
2. What are the lived experiences of African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges?
3. How do the lived experiences of African American male student athletes differ from African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges?

### **Research Methods**

A qualitative phenomenological methodology design was utilized to explore the lived experiences of African American male student athletes and African American male

student nonathletes. Qualitative inquiry is designed to explore the experiences of individuals and their interpretation of the meaning of their experiences (Patton, 2015). Merleau-Ponty (2013) explained that phenomenology is utilized in qualitative research to explore the perceptions of individuals. According to van Manen (2016), the phenomenological approach is used to capture the views of the individuals and allow them to make sense of their experiences. The purpose of this study was to capture the lived experiences of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes who attend California community colleges.

This study utilized a purposeful sampling frame to recruit the participants of this study. Participants for this study were recruited from the College of the Sequoias (COS), Fresno City College (FCC), and Merced Community College (MCC). A flier was developed and posted in each college's locker rooms by the football coach to recruit the football players. A second flier was made and posted by the men's and women's basketball coaches in the gym to recruit student nonathletes. In addition, purposeful random sampling was utilized to select student athletes who were football players and who were sophomores and student nonathletes who were sophomores. Semistructured interviewing was utilized to obtain data from each participant regarding their lived experiences while enrolled in community college. The in-depth interviewing technique was applied to all participants to answer open-ended and probing questions regarding their experiences to answer the three research questions of this study. All interviews occurred in-person and were audio recorded with the consent of each participant prior to engaging in the interview. The NVivo 12 computer software program was used to

transcribe and code each interview. Following the transcription of interviews, themes and patterns were merged to answer this study's research questions.

### **Population and Sample**

Given (2008) indicated that "population as a concept in research methods refers to every individual who fits the criteria (broad or narrow) that the researcher has laid out for research participants" (p. 644). There are 115 community colleges in the state of California with over 2.1 million students in attendance including 114 athletic programs across the state (CCCCO, 2018). According to Cal-Pass Plus (2018), there were 22,354 student athletes and 1,974,716 student nonathletes enrolled in the 2017-2018 fall academic year at all CC statewide. During this academic year, there were approximately 144 African American male student athletes and 2,794 African American male student nonathletes enrolled at COS, FCC, and MCC (Cal-Pass Plus, 2019b). The 114 African American male student athletes and 2,894 African American male student nonathletes made up the purposeful and random purposeful sampling of this study.

Daniel (2011) explained that purposeful sampling is utilized in qualitative research to allow for the selection of participants who meet the criteria of the study. Given (2008) stated, "After a purposive sampling process locates a set of eligible data sources, the next step might be to use random selection in deciding which cases to study" (p. 725). The sample group of this study consisted of 12 participants, six of whom were African American male student athletes and six of whom were African American male student nonathletes who were enrolled at COS, FCC, and MCC at the time of this study. The 12 participants met the following criteria of the study:



- African American
- Male
- Student football athlete who played two seasons
- Student nonathlete
- Completed at least 1 school year
- Enrolled at COS, FCC, and MCC
- Consented to participate in this study.

Patton (2015) explained that qualitative studies include a smaller number of participants. According to Dukes (1984), researchers only need 10 participants when conducting phenomenological studies. Furthermore, Riemen (1986) indicated that qualitative studies include up to at least 10 participants.

### **Major Findings**

The participants in this study provided data to three research questions regarding their lived experiences at their respective community colleges. Upon a thorough analysis of the data, the researcher developed criterion for the findings to be considered major. Findings that received a respondent rating of four or more and a frequency rating of 10 or greater were selected as major findings for this study.

#### **Major Finding 1: African American Males Who Are Low-Income First-Generation College Students Experience Challenges at California Community Colleges**

There were 11 out of 12 participants who were first-generation college students (FGCS). A few of the participants expressed that their parents attended college; however, there was only one parent among the participants who had a bachelor's degree. Research has consistently found that FGCS (especially African Americans) have less favorable outcomes in college (R. M. Evans, 2016; Mojica, 2017; Royal, 2017; K. A.

Tate et al., 2015). Studies have shown that because of financial barriers and being unprepared for college, FGCS have lower graduation rates and drop out of college at higher rates compared to non-FGCS (Ball, 2015; Kosses, 2019; Stephens et al., 2014; Sommerfeld & Bowen, 2013; Wilkins, 2014). The participants expressed having financial issues such as accessing academic resources, purchasing food, and caring for their basic necessities. Tinto (2012) recommended that higher educational institutions provide financial resources to FGCS and those who come from low-income backgrounds to prevent early departure from college. A couple of participants expressed that they had difficulty navigating college resulting from not having guidance from family, faculty, or their ego. Tinto (1993) posited that students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds need targeted resources and supports to excel academically in college. Therefore, it is vital that African American males who are FGCS be provided with adequate resources to improve their equity gaps in higher education.

### **Major Finding 2: African American Male Student Athletes Experience Struggles, Challenges, and Hardships Throughout Their Lives**

Being an African American male student athlete is a struggle as well as being challenging. All six African American male student athletes expressed that they have endured struggles, challenges, and hardships throughout their lifetimes. The African American male student athletes indicated that they experienced challenges such as being low-income and living in poverty during childhood. This finding is consistent with literature that has historically shown that the majority African American males are raised in impoverished neighborhoods and low-income households (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2012; Patten & Krogstad, 2015; Schott, 2019; Winship et al., 2018). The African American male student athletes expressed that poverty puts them at a

disadvantage, an obstacle that is followed by unwanted difficulties and obstacles. McElroy Williams and Andrews (2003) stated, “The poverty situation with black males in the United States is precarious at best—precarious because millions of black children and black youth are growing up in poverty, in circumstances that negatively affect their life chances” (p. 120). A few of the participants indicated that their lives have been rough simply because of the color of their skin. Smiley and Fakunle (2016) explained that African American males are labeled by default as “thugs,” are stereotyped, and degraded in society as a result of racism throughout America’s history. This depiction was consistent with a few statements from a couple of the participants regarding being stereotyped on their campuses. Some of the participants shared that they encountered academic struggles, which were a result of being unprepared for college and experiencing difficulties with professors. Dulabaum (2016) found that African American and Latino males are less prepared for the rigors of college, a fact that results in academic gap. Additionally, the participants in the study experienced challenges with receiving academic assistance from faculty and staff.

### **Major Finding 3: Friendships and Peer Relationships Are Important Among African American Male Student Athletes in California Community Colleges**

Having friends and peer support is important for overcoming obstacles and adversity during college. All six of the African American male student athletes indicated their friendships and peer relationships were beneficial throughout their collegiate journey. The phrase “we all we got” was utilized by all the athletes in this study. In her interview with Feminista Jones, Junior (2019) indicated that the term “we all we got” means the reliance on other African Americans for social and emotional support. A few of the participants indicated that they would not have made it through college without the

support of their African American friends and teammates. Yosso (2005) explained that social capital is considered as “networks of people” that allow people to draw support to navigate their way through society (p. 79). Tinto (2012) explained that retention is highly influenced by the social communities that an individual belongs to during college. Tinto (1993) indicated that social support is critical in the first year of college and is correlated with early departure from college. Research has found that social support is a factor of persistence among African American male student athletes at community colleges (Byrd, 2017; Christian, 2018; Hackett, 2011; LeNoir Messer, 2008; Veloz, 2015). Additionally, research has indicated that African Americans attend historically Black colleges and universities at a higher rate than predominantly White institutions to receive social and emotional support from others within their community to avoid and escape the encounters of microaggressions, stereotypical attitudes, and racism (Frazier, 2020; Gasman & Samayoa, 2017; Hardy, Kaganda, & Aruguete, 2019; J. Y. Lee, Khalil, & Boykin, 2019; Strayhorn, 2017).

#### **Major Finding 4: African American Male Student Athletes Need Informal Faculty and Staff Relationships at California Community Colleges**

Relationships with faculty and staff coaches are a necessity among African American male student athletes during community college. All six of the African American male student athletes specified that they needed and appreciated the support of their coaches. Gaines (2012) explained that African American male student athletes are a vulnerable population who need valuable supports that assist in successful outcomes. The author found that coaches were a strong support system for the football participants in the study. The African American male student athletes in this study agreed that they would not have been able to make it through college without the support of their coaches.

LeNoir Messer's (2008) study showed that coaches were a motivating factor for success among African American male student athletes. The findings showed that coaches were an essential support for African American male student athletes and positively impacted their lives. The findings in the study showed the coaches served as mentors among some of the football players. Byrd (2017) explained that African American male student athletes are successful when they have a strong sense of belonging and connectedness from caring individuals. The author's findings revealed that African American male student athletes described their coaches as being life coaches and confidants. Research has shown that African American male student athletes who have support from faculty and staff who assist in meeting their academic, social, and emotional needs are more likely to persist, transfer, obtain degrees, and experience successful outcomes (Byrd, 2017; Duron, 2017; James, 2013; Spriggs, 2007).

**Major Finding 5: Academic Supports Are Important for African American Male Student Athletes to Persist at California Community Colleges**

Tutors are a support needed for African American male student athletes to excel academically. All six of the African American male student athletes identified that they needed help from tutors to understand and complete their coursework. A few of the African American male student athletes expressed that the tutors explained the work more efficiently than their professors. Tinto's (2012) theory of institution action highly recommends that institutions provide students with academic supports such as tutors, access to libraries, study groups, and supplemental instruction to increase their retention and persistence rates. Research supports this theory by advocating for students to have access to tutoring services, computer labs, study groups, and printing services to foster their academic development (Azmitia, Sumabat-Estrada, Cheong, & Covarrubias, 2018;

Byrd, 2017; St. Surin, 2015; Tinto, 1993). The participants were able to overcome academic challenges with the help of tutors. Byrd's (2017) study showed that African American male student athletes were able to receive help through tutoring services that were offered through the student athlete resource center, which allowed them to overcome academic barriers. Hobneck, Mudge, & Turchi (2003) found that persistence is strongly correlated with institutional academic supports. The authors suggested that athletes be provided with tutoring, educational plans, access to study groups, and academic advisement to meet their unique needs. This finding is supported among retention and persistence researchers regarding the institutions' commitment to providing academic supports to meet the educational needs of students (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Borglum & Kubala, 2000; Marx, 2006; Tinto, 1990, 1993).

### **Major Finding 6: African American Male Student Nonathletes Experience Struggles, Challenges, and Hardships Throughout Their Lives**

Being an African American male is a struggle. All six of the African American male student nonathletes shared that they have encountered struggles and hardships throughout their lifetime. The participants indicated that they have endured academic, economic, and societal challenges. Bowman (2013) indicated that African American children are more likely to grow-up in impoverished neighborhoods with scarce resources, which results in emotional, mental, and spiritual stress. The author added that these socioeconomic deficits rob African Americans of living a quality life. A few of the African American male student nonathletes expressed that they experienced microaggressions on their campuses. This finding is consistent with decades of literature that has documented the racism, stereotypical attitudes, and the oppression that African American males endure throughout their lifetime (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000;

W. A. Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; W. A. Smith et al., 2011; Steele & Aronson, 1995; E. L. Wells, 2017). A couple of the African American male student nonathletes expressed that the African American male experience is “rougher” than the experiences of other races. Research has shown that African American males experience more challenges than their White counterparts during college (E. Bush & Bush, 2010; L. V. Bush & Bush, 2013; Grimes, 1997; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001; Lang, 1992; Nettles, 1988). The African American male student nonathletes shared that they faced numerous struggles at their colleges. E. Bush and Bush (2010) stated,

The two-year college represents the first experience with postsecondary education and is often African American male students’ last option for obtaining a degree beyond a high school diploma. More than 81% of all African American males attending college in California are enrolled in community colleges. Logic would dictate that if institutions are to impact positively the academic success rates of African American male students, then the community college materializes as the most expedient and the best positioned educational institution to address the plight of African American male students towards achievement in higher education. (p. 58)

Furthermore, research advocates for providing African American males with support throughout college to address their needs and to assist them in achieving successful outcomes (Adams-Mahaley, 2012; Hewitt-Clarke, 2019; Coburn, 2017; Credle & Dean, 1991; Fletcher, 2015; Pickett, 2017).

### **Major Finding 7: Academic Supports Are Important for African American Male Student Nonathletes to Persist at California Community Colleges**

Institutions that provided academic supports through on-campus programs are needed for retention and persistence. There were four out of the six African American male student nonathletes who indicated the academic support they received from on-campus programs was the most beneficial to their success. Tinto (1993) indicated that students of color need institutional academic supports to achieve success in college, especially those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. The literature has shown that African American males experience higher rates of success when they participate in on-campus supportive programs (A. G. Baldwin, 2015; Brogdon, 2019; Figaro, 2019; D. W. Foster, 2008; Senegal, 2011).

A couple of the participants indicated they received academic support from their counselor and advisor. Bratton's (2017) study found that African American males who attend community college are able to succeed with the support of their counselors and advisors. Research has indicated that African American males who attend community colleges need academic supports to experience successful outcomes (Berry, 2019; Fregoso, 2015; Gebru, 2009; Granger, 2011; King, 2016). Academic advising, basic skills courses, study groups, tutoring, attending faculty office hours, supplemental instruction, and progress monitoring are academic supports that are needed for persistence and successful transfer among African American male student nonathletes who attend CCC (Coburn, 2017; Ingram & Coaxum, 2018; Nichols, 2017; Pickett, 2017; Tinto, 2012).



### **Major Finding 8: Friendships and Peer Relationships Are Important Among African American Male Student Nonathletes at California Community Colleges**

Social support among friends and peers is necessary for persistence in college. All the African American male student nonathletes indicated they needed social support from their friends and peers to experience success in college. The phrase “we all we got” was echoed throughout the African American male student nonathletes’ narratives as they indicated they relied on the social and emotional support from members within their community to overcome challenges and obstacles they experienced while in college. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) indicated that “peer influence is a statistically significant positive force in students’ persistence decisions” (p. 418). In addition, Apugo (2017) found that African American same-race peer relationship provides stability to individuals, which allows them to persist in college. In addition, the author highlighted that same-race peer relationships act as a buffer regarding experiences of racism, discrimination, and microaggressions. Furthermore, research has proven that friendships allow individuals to feel less stress, provide social and emotional support, allow one to feel a sense of significance and belonging, and increase persistence and retention rates (M. O. Brown, 2018; Byrd, 2017; Feldman, 2018; St. Louis Community College, 2011; Tinto, 2012).

### **Major Finding 9: African American Male Student Nonstudent Nonathletes Need Informal Faculty and Staff Relationships at California Community Colleges**

Relationships with faculty and staff are needed for African American male student nonathletes to persist at California community colleges. There were four out of six African American male student nonathletes who expressed that the support they received from faculty and staff was beneficial to their success in college. Tinto (1993)

explained that informal faculty and staff relationships “are a critical component in student persistence generally and student intellectual development in particular” (p. 108). In addition, college retention theorists posit that informal relationships with faculty and staff increase the likelihood of persistence and retention (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Reason, 2003; Swail, 2004). A couple of the participants expressed that they received profound mentoring from African American staff within the support programs. Tinto (1993) expressed that students of color need to have opportunities to be among faculty and staff who look like them. Additionally, studies have shown that African American male student nonathletes benefit from Black Male Initiative Programs where they receive support from African American faculty and staff (Brooms, 2018; J. D. Coleman, 2016; Harewood, 2013; Ingram & Coaxum, 2018).

### **Conclusions**

The findings of this study resulted in the following conclusions.

#### **Conclusion 1: African American Males Encounter Challenges at California Community Colleges**

It is concluded that African American males experience challenges at California community colleges. Each participant in this study expressed that they faced either academic, financial, racial, and relational challenges at their colleges. Thus, it is important for California community colleges to foster a positive environment with holistic supports that address the unique needs of African American males. African American males need an equitable education that is free from racial oppression, stereotypical attitudes, and microaggressions. Additionally, because of the low graduation rates of African American males with the California community college system, leaders need to ensure that their college campuses are free from such adverse

experiences. Beamon (2014) suggested that universities provide African American males with safe spaces to report incidences of racism and offer opportunities to build coping mechanisms to reduce feelings of isolation and to prevent these students from dropping out of college.

Tinto (1993) indicated that institutions must be committed to meeting the needs of all students enrolled on their campuses. Furthermore, Marx (2006) explained that student athletes have unique needs and require additional supports such as meaningful interaction with their coaches and social connectedness with their teammates. The author also indicated that there should be progress monitoring of the athlete's goals. The participants voiced their frustrations with experiencing issues with their instructors and professors that they believed to be a direct result of simply being African American. Esters and Mosby (2007) stated,

What is most alarming about the current state of the Black male on America's community college campuses is that those who are in positions of leadership have been slow to recognize the situation as a state of emergency and have been almost reluctant to own up to their responsibility to take corrective action. (p. 3)

Research has historically shown that African American males experience more unfavorable outcomes throughout their postsecondary journeys compared to their counterparts (E. Bush & Bush, 2005; Dulabaum, 2016; Garibaldi, 1986, 1997, 2007; Jay, 2018; Solorzano et al., 2000). As a result, literature recommends that African American males be provided with institutional supports to reduce the equity gaps in higher education (E. Bush & Bush, 2010; Dulabaum, 2016; Emetu, 2019; Nichols, 2017; Pryor, 2018). Bryant (2015) pointed out, "College degree attainment is regarded as a primary

solution to reduce poverty and close wealth gaps between people of color and whites in the United States” (p. 1). Therefore, it is important for institutions to be committed to providing academic, emotional, financial, and social supports so that African American male student nonathletes can experience successful outcomes (Tinto, 1993, 2012).

Tinto (1975) suggested that students have an early departure from college as a result of their family background; individual characteristics such as age, gender, and race; level of commitment; and institutional commitment. Thus, Tinto’s (1990, 1993) college retention theory encourages institutions to provide early prevention and continued intervention supports that increase persistence rates. Furthermore, Tinto’s (2012) Framework of Institutional Action recommends that institutions provide students with academic supports such as basic skills courses, financial supports such as stipends, and social supports such as informal faculty relationships so that students can experience success. Most importantly, Tinto (2012) explained that students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds need a variety of institutional supports to excel in college.

### **Conclusion 2: African American Males Need Social Supports to Experience Success at California Community Colleges**

It is concluded that African American males need social supports to experience successful outcomes in college. This support can come from faculty, staff, friends, peers, and through student involvement. Some of the participants shared that they had a valuable experience from their participation in on-campus programs. In addition, they shared that the social support they received from faculty and staff within their programs were beneficial. Tinto (1993) explained that “communities, educational or otherwise, which care for and reach out to their members and which are committed to their members’ welfare are also those which keep and nourish their members” (p. 205). Some

of the participants expressed that the most beneficial social support they received came from their coaches and teammates. The literature has shown social support received from coaches is a factor of persistence among African American male student athletes (Christian, 2018; Duron, 2017; Gaines, 2012; James, 2013; Pryor, 2018). Social support increases the well-being of students and reduces stress (Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015; Carter-Francique, Hart, & Steward, 2013; Morelli, Lee, Arnn, & Zaki, 2015). A couple of the participants shared that the support they received from the mentors in their programs was essential. Tinto (2012) stated, “Student retention is also shaped, directly and indirectly, by social forces internal and external to campus, especially those that influence students’ sense of belonging and membership in the social communities of the institution” (p. 28). Notably, academic achievement is positively correlated with friendship and peer support (D. R. Baldwin, Towler, Oliver, & Datta, 2017; Cassidy, 2015; Feldman, 2018; Tinto, 2012). Tinto (1975) indicated that students who feel a sense of belonging and connectedness are more likely to persist in college. Therefore, it is vital for African American males; especially those who are low-income and FGCS, to have faculty and staff who care about their well-being. Furthermore, Feldman (2018) indicated,

For first-generation, low-income students . . . many successful social-belonging, values affirmation, and difference-education interventions only take a few hours and relatively cost little to implement, but make a big difference by showing struggling students that they are not alone, their feelings are valid, and that things will get better. (p. 268)

### **Conclusion 3: African American Males Need Academic Supports Experience Academic Success at California Community Colleges**

It is concluded that African American males need tutors to experience academic success at California community colleges. A few of the participants expressed their appreciation and gratitude for the support they received from tutors. Tutors were a source of academic support among the student athletes, and they were able to understand their assignments with the assistance of the tutors. The African American male student athletes indicated that they were required to go to study hall and study central, which allowed them to receive help with their coursework. Cooper and Hawkins (2012) pointed out that African American males benefit from a variety of academic supports such as writing labs, academic centers, and tutoring. There were 11 out of 12 participants in this study who were FGCS and experienced challenges with understanding their professors. Research shows that academic supports are needed for marginalized groups to succeed in college (Bers & Schuetz, 2014; Manzoni & Streib, 2019; Tinto, 2012). Moreover, Cooper and Hawkins (2012) stated, “Since, both university-wide student and athletic department academic support services have similar goals, it would be beneficial for these departments to collaborate on effective strategies designed to improve academic achievement among Black male student athletes” (p. 183).

A couple of the participants indicated the academic supports they received were needed to overcome the challenges they experienced with their coursework. A few of the African American males explained that they received valuable academic support from their participation in on-campus programs. The participants were able to have more time for test and quizzes, which allowed them to experience academic success. McBride

(2017) explained that for African American males to experience success in college, they must be provided with

Academic enrichment and mentoring to enhance the broad range of academic skills necessary for them to be successful in college; skill development such as customized sessions on time management, textbook comprehension, note taking, studying, and test taking; mentoring that includes both peer-to-peer and adult-to-peer relationships that ensure support and provide advice and guidance. (p. 2)

A couple of the participants expressed that they had a disability that resulted in experiencing difficulties with understanding their coursework. Research shows that students with disabilities need increased supports to experience academic success (Couzens et al., 2015; De Los Santos, Kupczynski, & Mundy, 2019; Lechtenberger, Brak, Sokolosky, & McCrary, 2012; Lombardi, Murray, & Gerdes, 2012).

#### **Conclusion 4: African American Male Student Athletes and Student Nonathletes Have Similar Experiences at California Community Colleges**

The findings showed that both African American male student athletes and student nonathletes had similar experiences at their California community colleges. All the participants experienced hardship, racism, microaggressions, and poverty before entering college. Sadly, while in college, the participants had the same experiences. Research has highlighted that both African American male student athletes and student nonathletes experience racism, discrimination, microaggressions, and stereotype threat on their campus (Anthony, 2016; E. L. Wells, 2017; Harden, 2019; Rahman, 2018; Walker, 2019). Furthermore, all the participants indicated academic and social support was needed to experience successful outcomes. Although the student athletes mentioned academic and social supports more frequently than the student nonathletes, their

experiences remained similar. The only differences in social support was that athletes received social support from their coaches, friends, and teammates whereas the student nonathletes received support from mentors, faculty and staff, and their friends. The student athletes utilized tutorial services more often than the student nonathletes, mainly because this was a requirement for the student athletes. Tinto (1993) posits that students of color need specific and targeted services to achieve academic success in college and institutions must be committed to helping them achieve such success.

### **Implications for Action**

The major findings of this study led to the development of the following implications of action.

#### **Implication 1: Connect African American Male Student Athletes to Community Resources**

The findings of this study showed that African American male athletes experience challenges that African American male student nonathletes do not experience. This is mainly caused by their status of being both student and athlete. The African American male student athletes expressed challenges of balancing school and academic schedules, financial barriers, out-of-state tuition restrictions, a lack of food, and issues with being misunderstood. All African American male student athletes should have the opportunity to sign up for government assistance in the form of medical, SNAP benefits, and Section 8 housing through their institutions. These government agencies should partner with institutions to link African American male student athletes to their services. In addition, African American male student athletes should have the opportunity to receive food through local food banks and other community agencies that provide food for individuals.



## **Implication 2: California Community Colleges Need to Foster a More Supportive Environment Toward African American Male Student Athletes**

The major findings of this study revealed that African American male student athletes experienced hardships and challenges at their respective community colleges. Research has shown a variety of challenges that African American male players experience such as stereotypes, being labeled as lazy, academic deficits, financial issues, and identity issues that result in unfavorable outcomes (Beamon, 2014; Griffin, 2016; Hawkins, 2010; Hyatt, 2003; J. Porter, 2019). Therefore, college presidents should be committed to creating an atmosphere that allows African American male players to excel academically, thrive socially, and feel a sense of belonging and connectedness. College presidents need to provide faculty and staff with culturally responsive training to reduce bias. All faculty and staff should be required to take annual culturally responsive training to create safe spaces for cultural sensitivity and understanding of African American males. Departmental deans should be required to meet with African American male student athletes quarterly to engage in relationship building activities and monitor their progress. Counselors and advisors should be required to meet with African American male student athletes at least once a month for goal setting and progress monitoring. Coaches should be provided with annually training regarding supporting the holistic needs of African American male student athletes. College leaders should create opportunities for African American male student athletes and student nonathletes to engage in workshops that provide a better understanding of their experiences. Most importantly, faculty members need to understand the work, energy, and time that it takes to be an athlete and provide grace to African American male student athletes.

### **Implication 3: Provide all African American Male Student Athletes With a Personal Tutor**

The findings of this study concluded that African American male student athletes need tutors to experience academic success. The majority of the African American male student athletes indicated that they were the first in their families to attend college. They also indicated that they were unprepared for the rigors of college. Research shows that students need the academic assistance of tutors to ensure equity among disadvantaged populations (Cardichon & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hébert, 2018; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2019; Tinto, 2012). Every African American male student athlete should be provided with a tutor in his freshman year. These individuals should be required to spend at least 10 hours a week with their tutors to improve their understanding of assignments and academic concepts. Tutors should receive quarterly training to improve their comprehension and writing skills to provide satisfactory services to African American male student athletes. African American male student athletes should be provided with a computer upon enrollment to ensure that they have adequate materials to complete their coursework. Also, these individuals should receive access to weekend tutoring services to ensure they are caught up with their coursework.

### **Implication 4: Provide African American Male Student Nonathletes With Structured Supports Who Attend California Community Colleges**

The major findings of this study showed that African American male student nonathletes struggled academically, socially, and financially. These students should be connected to campus programs beginning in their freshman year. The African American male student nonathletes were FGCS who had difficulties navigating through college;

therefore, college leaders need to provide academic, social, and financial supports to meet their needs. African American male student nonathletes should have the opportunity to be assigned a tutor within their freshman year for academic assistance. Tutors should receive culturally relevant training to properly assist these students in comprehending their assignments. African American male student nonathletes who are FGCS should be offered internships and receive stipends to receive financial support to fund their education and other needs. African American male student nonathletes should be required to meet with their counselors and advisors regularly with their first year of enrollment. Counselors and advisors should be equipped and properly trained to meet the needs of this population.

**Implication 5: Provide Comprehensive Mentoring Programs to African American Male Student Nonathletes at California Community Colleges**

The major findings of this study revealed that African American male student nonathletes were able to persist with the support of mentors. Literature has documented that mentors and informal faculty-student relationships are an institutional factor that is positively correlated with the success of African American male student nonathletes (M. O. Brown, 2018; Burney, 2018; E. Bush & Bush, 2005; Harewood, 2013; Haywood, 2018; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980). Therefore, African American male student nonathletes, especially those who are FCGS who are enrolled at the community college level should be required to participate in a mentoring program. Mentoring programs should include components of holistic wellness, academic readiness, counseling support, individual coaching, and career readiness. Furthermore, African American males should have unlimited access to these services throughout their collegiate programs. African American males should be assigned a mentor in their freshman year. Mentors should

receive consistent training to address the needs of African American male student nonathletes. Mentors and mentees need opportunities to effectively engage in building relationships with one another to increase the likelihood of academic success. Tinto (1993) stated, “To the degree that retention is everyone’s responsibility, so too is the retention of students of color everyone’s responsibility, not just that of a few administrative and support staff assigned to those programs” (p. 185).

**Implication 6: Provide All College Faculty and Staff With Training to Address Unconscious Bias**

The participants in this study unanimously voiced that they experienced microaggressions and stereotypical attitudes from faculty and staff. The participants explained that they were “looked at differently” and treated differently than their peers. This finding is consistent with what literature has found regarding the racism, oppression, and microaggressions that African American males experience in college (E. Bush & Bush, 2010; D. B. Lee et al., 2018; W. A. Smith et al., 2016; Solorzano et al., 2000; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2015). Therefore, to close the equity gaps in higher education for African American males, community college presidents and leaders need to provide training for their staff to address their prejudices and biases against African Americans. Faculty and staff need to take quarterly culturally responsive training. Faculty and staff also need to be held accountable when their actions include prejudice, stereotypical attitudes, and microaggressions against students and faculty. E. Bush and Bush (2010) recommended that community college leaders “encourage faculty members to include in their coursework the significant contributions made by Africans to humanity in all areas of academic disciplines” (p. 58). In addition, community college presidents need to

ensure that their staff members foster a culturally sensitive and responsive environment to ensure the safety of students.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The recommendations for further research are as follows:

1. It is recommended that more phenomenology studies be conducted regarding the experiences of African American male football student athletes and African American male student nonathletes at community colleges to add to the body of literature.
2. It is recommended that a mixed methods study be conducted to investigate the factors that cause African American male football student athletes and African American male student nonathletes to drop out of California community colleges.
3. It is recommended that an ethnographic study be conducted regarding the perceptions of the identity of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes who attend community colleges.
4. It is recommended that a grounded theory study be conducted on the factors that motivate African American male student athletes and African American student nonathletes to attend college.
5. It is recommended that future qualitative studies explore the factors that promote the persistence of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges.
6. It is recommended that case studies be conducted regarding the perceptions of community college institutional fit among African American male football student athletes and African American male student nonathletes.

7. It is recommended that future qualitative studies be conducted to examine the effectiveness of institutional academic, financial, and social supports provided to African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes enrolled at California community colleges.
8. It is recommended that a mixed methods study be conducted on the perceptions of the support received from coaches among African American male football student athletes at community colleges.
9. It is recommended that future qualitative studies explore the self-determination of African American male student athletes.
10. It is recommended that future qualitative studies explore the effectiveness of mentoring programs that provide support to African American student nonathletes.
11. It is recommended that future case studies examine the resilience of African American males who attend California community colleges.
12. It is recommended that future case studies explore the experiences of African Americans male student athletes who are non-FGCS compared to African American male student nonathletes who are non-FGCS.
13. It is recommended that future qualitative studies explore the perceptions of African American males regarding how the unconscious bias of college staff have an impact on their well-being.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and differences between African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes at California community colleges. The study

identified several factors attributed to the lived experiences of African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes. African American male student athletes experienced more challenges because of being an athlete, had more social support from their coaches and teammates, and utilized the student labs and support centers more than the African American male student nonathletes. African American male student nonathletes had more support from being in on-campus programs, received the majority of their social support from counselors and advisors, and encountered more difficulties with the coursework than the African American male student athletes. The resilience of these young adult men in this study is proof of their hard work, drive, dedication, and determination. Therefore, it is possible for African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes to be successful when provided the necessary support services.

Not only do African American males experience negative outcomes in high school; they continue to experience them in college. The participants expressed their appreciation for being involved in on-campus programs. One participant stated, “The Symbaa Program is helpful because they mentor us. They make sure we have everything to not get back in the streets. They help us with resumes, food, and are just there for us. I really appreciate the help.” It is imperative that higher educational institutions commit to providing programs such as social, academic, mentorship, mental health services, and academic advising to support African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes to be support their success.

## **Personal Reflections**

Through my research for this study, I found African American males have been filled with unsuccessful outcomes. The interviews were heartbreaking as the participants described their experiences with being African American males. As I reflect on my experiences and the stories of the participants, I agree that it is rough being African American, and the struggle is definitely real. Growing up as a first-generation, minority, low socioeconomic, student athlete, I encountered similar experiences of the participants. When I competed at the community college and university level, my teammates were like family. Every day at practice, we would motivate each other to complete the workouts. During competition, we would all be present at each other's event to yell and scream words of support and encouragement. Off the track, we would have breakfast, lunch, and dinner together. We would often support each other academically, financially, and emotionally. The bond created was like a second family. Those same teammates continue to be in my life. We celebrate our milestones of those of our children, and we continue to make unforgettable memories.

My coaches served as my mentors, providing financial, emotional, and mental support, and my teammates were key for creating a family atmosphere. This is a similar experience to that of the participants. The participants expressed that the social support they received from their coaches and teammates was most beneficial. One participant stated, "They [teammates] have come through for me a lot. I have been able to make it through with their support. Without them, I don't know what I would do." Another added, "Without the coaches and peers, I don't think I would be able to make it. Without them I would have dropped out." Coaches understand the importance of recruiting not



only the best athletes but also athletes with personalities that would connect with one another. My university coach encouraged the team to hang out and get to know each other. He strategically selected us to form his team and therefore took into consideration how we would work as a team without him present. With his leadership and guidance, we were successful at supporting one another on and off the field. Through this experience, I felt a sense of belonging. It felt like the others on my team understood my end goals, and I understood theirs. We had a commonality of being part of an elite team, and we all wanted to be winners. I felt motivated when I saw my fellow teammates working out. It encouraged me to work harder. Being on the team made me want to push harder to be successful. This was important to me because I wanted to demonstrate to my family that hard work does pay off, and each of our journeys is different yet with determination, we all can make our dreams come true.

I've had the opportunity to work for the California community colleges for over 10 years. During this time, I taught many African American male student athletes and African American male student nonathletes via my business courses. They are often placed in my courses because of my ability to support these students. Often serving as a mother role to them, I got to understand the institutional barriers that created equity challenges for these young men. As a result, I started the Black Faculty & Staff Association, which implemented a mentorship program that assisted and guided students through their college experience; fostered mentoring relationships that support students' journey toward self-reliance, successful graduation, and transfer to a 4-year institution or job placement; and challenged students to work through personal and academic challenges and build self-esteem and confidence through the pursuit of higher education.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

**Flyer: Student Football Athletes**



*Are You A: Black, Male, Athlete, Football Player, and Want to Make A Difference?*

- SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH BEING THESE THINGS AS A STUDENT AT COLLEGE OF SEQUOIAS, FRESNO CITY, OR MERCED COMMUNITY COLLEGES!
- INTERVIEWS WILL LAST 45-60 MINUTES AND WILL BE CONDUCTED IN PERSON
- THIS STUDY WILL PROVIDE A BLUEPRINT TO COMMUNITY COLLEGES REGARDING HOW TO SUPPORT AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ATHLETES AND NON-ATHLETES
- PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY AND CONFIDENTIAL
- TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY YOU MUST HAVE PLAYED AT LEAST 2 SEASONS, ARE A SOPHOMORE, AND ARE ACADEMICALLY ELIGIBLE

PLEASE CONTACT MARIE HARRIS AT 559.977.2281 OR MHARRI18@MAIL.BRANDMAN.EDU TO BE A PARTICIPANT IN THIS STUDY



**Flyer: Student Nonathletes**



*Are You A: Black, Male and Want to Make A Difference?*

- SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH BEING A STUDENT AT COLLEGE OF SEQUOIAS, FRESNO CITY, OR MERCED COMMUNITY COLLEGES!
- INTERVIEWS WILL LAST 45-60 MINUTES AND WILL BE CONDUCTED IN PERSON
- THIS STUDY WILL PROVIDE A BLUEPRINT TO COMMUNITY COLLEGES REGARDING HOW TO SUPPORT AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE NON-STUDENT-ATHLETES
- PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY AND CONFIDENTIAL
- 

PLEASE CONTACT MARIE HARRIS AT 559.977.2281 OR MHARRI18@MAIL.BRANDMAN.EDU TO BE A PARTICIPANT IN THIS STUDY

APPENDIX B

**Synthesis Matrix**

Overarching Theme	Concept	References
African American males experience negative outcomes compared to their counterparts	African American males experience unfavorable outcomes throughout their lifetime such as poverty, racism, mass incarceration, discrimination, police brutality, and trauma.	Coulter, 2014; DeLuca, Wood, & Rosenblatt, 2019; Dennis & Dennis, 2008; Feagin, 2013; Kendi, 2016; Konigsburg, 2017; National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2012; Nehl, Elifson, DePadilla, & Sterk, 2016; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018; Patten and Krogstad, 2015; Schimmenti, 2018; Schott, 2019; Stansfield & Doherty, 2019; Thomas, Caldwell, Assari, Jagers, & Flay, 2016; Trounstine, 2018; Vogel & Van Ham, 2018;
African American males have higher deficient educational outcomes compared to their counterparts	African American males are less likely to excel in academics throughout their K-12 schooling and throughout their higher educational journeys; resulting in high enrollment in community college, higher dropout rates while in college, and less four-year degree completion compared to all other ethnic groups.	Gardner, Rizzi, & Council, 2014; Hill & Roberts, 2019; Howard, 2015; Hunter, 2015; Kuhfeld, Gershoff, & Paschall, 2018; Leefatt, 2015; Lenard & Peña, 2018; McBride, 2017; Musu-Gillette, L., de Brey, McFarland, Hussar, Sonnenberg, and Wilkinson-Flicker, 2017; Musu-Gillette, Robinson, McFarland, KewalRamani, Zhang, & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2016; Potter & Morris, 2017; Ransaw & Majors, 2016, 2017; Shapiro, Dunder, Huie, Wakhungu, Yuan, Nathan, & Bhimdiwali, 2017; United States of Education, Civil Rights Office, 2014

<p>African American males experience challenges and barriers at the community college level</p>	<p>Both African American male student athletes and student nonathletes experience things such as racial bias, stereotypical attitudes, financial issues, unpreparedness, and stress during college which prevent them from achieving higher educational success.</p>	<p>ACT, 2016; Adams-Mahaley, 2012; Anthony, 2016; Beamon, 2014; Bimper, 2015; Branch, 2017; CCCSE, 2014a; Davis, 2016; Educational Results Partnership, 2019; Evans, 2016; Harris, 2014; Harris &amp; Wood, 2013; Hotchkins, 2016; Jagers, 2017; Lee, 2017; Lee, Bernstein, Etzel, Gearity, &amp; Kuklick, 2018; Markus, Lindsay, &amp; Kenneth, 2013; McBride, 2017; PNPI 2017; PPIC, 2016; Richburg, 2014; Singer, 2016; Smith et al., 2016; Tate, Fouad, Marks, Young, Guzman, &amp; Williams, 2015; Vedder, 2018; Veloz', 2015; Walker, 2019; Williams, 2017</p>
<p>Factors that increase the educational success of African American males at the community college level</p>	<p>Literature supports that African American males should be supported throughout education to experience success due to the unnecessary and unwanted challenges, barriers, and adversities they experience throughout their lifetime. Researchers suggests that programs such as the Black Male Initiative, academic, financial, and social supports be provided to African American males in order that they may achieve success and live a quality life.</p>	<p>Beckett, 2015; Brannon, 2015; Bratton, 2017; Brooms, 2018; Byrd, 2017; CCCSE, 2014b; Castleman &amp; Goodman, 2018; Coleman, 2016; Coburn, 2017; Cunningham, 2013; Emetu, 2019; Engle, Bermeo, Fletcher, 2015; Harewood, 2013; Hewitt-Clarke, 2019; Ingram and Coaxum, 2018; Kirkman, 2018; Kim, 2014; Lipscomb, 2018; Nichols, 2017; Ozaki and Spaid, 2016; Pickett, 2017; Riley-Tepie, 2018; Staples, 2017; Tinto, 1993, 2012; White, 2016.</p>

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Protocol

#### Interview Protocol Template for African American Male Athletes

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study. My name is Marie Harris, and I am a doctoral candidate at Brandman University in the Organizational Leadership Program. I am conducting research on the experiences of African American male athletes and African American male non-athletes at California community colleges.

For this study, I will be conducting interviews with African American male students at California community colleges. The information that you provide will provide an understanding of the support needed for African American male athletes and non-athletes to be successful.

The interview questions that you will be asked are identical for every participant in this study to maintain uniformity in the research.

#### **Informed Consent**

As stated on the informed consent form, all of the information collected from your interviews will remain confidential. Your data will be reported without reference to you. After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you so that you can ensure accuracy of your thoughts and ideas.

We will begin with reviewing the Letter of Invitation, Informed Consent Form, the Participant's Bill of Rights, and the Audio Release Form. Then after reviewing all the forms, you will be asked to sign documents pertinent for this study, which include the Informed Consent and Audio Release Form.

Did you receive the Informed Consent and Brandman Bill of Rights I sent you via email? Do you have any questions or need clarification about either document?

We have scheduled an hour for the interview. At any point during the interview, you may ask that I skip a particular question or stop the interview altogether. For ease of our discussion and accuracy, I will record our conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

#### **Athlete**

##### Survey Questions

1. What is your current age?
2. Do you consider yourself African American?
3. When did you graduate from high school?
4. What was your high school grade point average?
5. When did you start attending community college full time?
6. What community college do you attend?

7. Do you play for a men's athlete team at your college and if so what sport?
8. Are you in your second season of your sport?
9. How many semesters have you completed?
10. How many units have you completed?
11. What is your overall grade point average?
12. What is your educational goal?
13. Did your parents attend college?
14. Are you eligible to receive financial aid?
15. How do you pay for college?

### **Interview Questions**

1. Tell me your experience being an African American male.
2. What is your experience being an African American male student at your college?

**Probe:** *Do you have more to add?*

3. What prepared for doing college level work?

**Probe:** How do you feel about it?

4. What have you enjoyed about college?
5. What challenges have you encountered in college?

**Probe:** *Can you elaborate on (challenge)?*

6. Describe your experience as a community college athlete?
7. What academic supports have been offered to you at the community college?
8. What academic supports have been beneficial for you?
9. What social supports have been offered to you at the community college?
10. What social supports have been beneficial for you?
11. What financial supports have been offered to you at the community college?
12. What financial supports have been beneficial for you?

**Probe:** *Is there any other support and/or resources you think will be helpful for you to be successfully as a student at the community college?*

13. What advice would you give to other African American male athletes who attend community college?

14. Do you have anything else you would like to add about your experience as an African American student athlete at the community college?

“I appreciate your participation in this study. When the results are finalized, I will send you a copy of the findings.”

## **Interview Protocol Template for African American Male Non-Student Athletes**

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study. My name is Marie Harris, and I am a doctoral candidate at Brandman University in the Organizational Leadership Program. I am conducting research on the experiences of African American male athletes and African American male non-athletes at California community colleges.

For this study, I will be conducting interviews with African American male students at California community colleges. The information that you provide will provide an understanding of the support needed for African American male athletes and non-athletes to be successful.

The interview questions that you will be asked are identical for every participant in this study to maintain uniformity in the research.

### **Informed Consent**

As stated on the informed consent form, all of the information collected from your interviews will remain confidential. Your data will be reported without reference to you. After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you so that you can ensure accuracy of your thoughts and ideas.

We will begin with reviewing the Letter of Invitation, Informed Consent Form, the Participant's Bill of Rights, and the Audio Release Form. Then after reviewing all the forms, you will be asked to sign documents pertinent for this study, which include the Informed Consent and Audio Release Form.

Did you receive the Informed Consent and Brandman Bill of Rights I sent you via email? Do you have any questions or need clarification about either document?

We have scheduled an hour for the interview. At any point during the interview, you may ask that I skip a particular question or stop the interview altogether. For ease of our discussion and accuracy, I will record our conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

### **Non-Athlete**

#### **Survey Questions**

1. What is your current age?
2. Do you consider yourself African American?
3. When did you graduate from high school?
4. What was your high school grade point average?
5. When did you start attending community college full time?
6. What community college do you attend?
7. Are you a sophomore?
8. How many semesters have you completed?
9. How many units have you completed?

10. What is your overall grade point average?
11. What is your educational goal?
12. Did your parents attend college?
13. Are you eligible to receive financial aid?
14. How do you pay for college?

### **Interview Questions**

1. Tell me your experience being an African American male.
2. What is your experience being an African American male student at your college?

**Probe:** *Do you have more to add?*

3. What prepared for doing college level work?

**Probe:** How do you feel about it?

4. What have you enjoyed about college?
5. What challenges have you encountered in college?

**Probe:** *Can you elaborate on (challenge)?*

6. What academic supports have been offered to you at the community college?
7. What academic supports have been beneficial for you?
8. What social supports have been offered to you at the community college?
9. What social supports have been beneficial for you?
10. What financial supports have been offered to you at the community college?
11. What financial supports have been beneficial for you?

**Probe:** *Is there any other support and/or resources you think will be helpful for you to be successfully as a student at the community college?*

12. What advice would you give to other African American male who attend community college?



13. Do you have anything else you would like to add about your experience as an African American student at the community college?

“I appreciate your participation in this study. When the results are finalized, I will send you a copy of the findings.”

## APPENDIX D

### Alignment Table

Research question	Corresponding interview questions athletes	Corresponding interview questions non-athletes
1. What are the lived experiences of African American male athletes at California Community Colleges?	Questions 1-14	
2. What are the lived experiences of African American male non-athletes at California Community Colleges?		Questions 1-13
3. How does the lived experiences of African American male athletes differ from African American male non-athletes at California Community Colleges?	Questions 1-14	Questions 2-13

## APPENDIX E

### Informed Consent Form

**INFORMATION ABOUT:** The Lived Experiences of African American Male Students: An exploration of African American Male Student-Athletes and African American Male Non-Student-Athletes at California Community Colleges.

**RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR:** Marie Harris

**PURPOSE OF STUDY:** You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by *Marie Harris*, M.B.A a doctoral student in the organizational leadership program at Brandman University. The purpose of this research is to explore the lived experiences of African American male athletes and African American male non-athletes at California Community Colleges. In addition, the aim of this study is to examine the difference of experiences that African American male athletes have compared to African American male non-athletes.

By participating in this study, I agree to participate in a 45- to 60-minute one-on-one interview with the responsible investigator. The interview will be conducted in person. Interviews will occur October through November, 2019.

I understand that:

- a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping any identifying information on a password protected computer, online using password protected applications (i.e., Google Drive), or in a locked filing cabinet only available to the researcher.
- b) I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all recordings, transcripts and notes taken by the researcher and transcripts from the interview will be destroyed.
- c) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input will add to the research on how to best support classroom teachers in their learning. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.
- d) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, feel free to contact Marie Harris at mharri18@mail.brandman.edu; or Dr. Tod Burnett (chair) at tburnett@brandman.edu.
- e) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any

negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. I also know that I may ask questions about the study before, during, or after the interview.

- f) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

---

Signature of Participant

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Date

---

Signature of Principal Investigator

---


Date

APPENDIX F


**Protection of Human Subjects**



**Certificate of Completion**



The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Marie Harris** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants."



**Date of Completion:** 05/18/2018

**Certification Number:** 2817982



## APPENDIX G

### **IRB Approval**

Dear Marie Harris,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If you need to modify your BUIRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at [IRB.Brandman.edu](http://IRB.Brandman.edu)

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank You,

BUIRB

Academic Affairs

**Brandman University**

16355 Laguna Canyon Road

Irvine, CA 92618

[buirb@brandman.edu](mailto:buirb@brandman.edu)

[www.brandman.edu](http://www.brandman.edu)

A Member of the Chapman University System

This email is an automated notification. If you have questions please email us at [buirb@brandman.edu](mailto:buirb@brandman.edu).

APPENDIX H

IRB Approval College of the Sequoias



Marie Harris  
559-977-2281  
mharri18@mail.brandman.edu  
March 6, 2020

Project Title: The lived experiences of African American male students: An exploration of African American male student-athletes and African American male non-student-athletes at California Community Colleges.

Dear Ms. Marie Harris,

Thank you for submitting your application to conduct external research at the College of the Sequoias. Outside entities and individuals interested in conducting research at COS must obtain approval from the COS Office of Research, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness. On a case-by-case basis, COS considers requests from outside entities interested in conducting research studies at our campuses. In order to protect the privacy of our students and employees, the District considers all research involving the use of humans as being subject to federal regulations regardless of the type of research being performed or the source of funding.

Your proposal was reviewed and evaluated according to the District policies and guidelines that govern the administration of external research proposals. After a thorough review and discussion, we have decided to approve your request with the following recommendations:

**CRITERIA REQUIRED TO APPROVE INFORMED CONSENT**

m.	<b>Contact information for someone from COS independent of the research team</b> for questions, concerns, problems, or input and for answers to pertinent questions about the research participant's rights.
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Please contact Brent Davis, Associate Dean of P.E. and Athletics, at 559-730-3912 or [brentd@cos.edu](mailto:brentd@cos.edu). Dean Davis has agreed to facilitate your study at COS.

## IRB Approval Fresno City College



# Fresno City College

1101 East University Avenue, Fresno, California 93741 Phone: 559-442-8757

*Office of Educational Services and Institutional Effectiveness  
Robert Pimentel, Ed.D, Vice President of Educational Services &  
Institutional Effectiveness.*

To whom it may concern:

This letter is to inform you that Fresno City College is committed to helping Ms. Marie Harris with her doctoral research project. Ms. Harris already inquired and provided the following items to the State Center Community College Institutional Review Board:

- a. A copy of the methodology section (chapter 3), and instruments (questionnaire for interviews) that will be used during her research.
- b. Copy of the Informed Consent Form that will be used.

Because this research project is being conducted as part of her dissertation research, the college will need an approved IRB from Brandman University before Ms. Harris can conduct her research. However, we will allow her to begin marketing and recruiting for her project if the University allows her to begin prior to her IRB being approved.

If you have any questions please contact me via email at [robert.pimentel@fresnocitycollege.edu](mailto:robert.pimentel@fresnocitycollege.edu) or you can reach me via phone at 559-442-8257.

Sincerely,

Dr. Robert Pimentel  
Vice President of Educational Services & Institutional Effectiveness  
Fresno City College  
1101 East University Ave  
Fresno CA 93741  
559-442-8257 | [Robert.pimentel@fresnocitycollege.edu](mailto:Robert.pimentel@fresnocitycollege.edu)  
[www.fresnocitycollege.edu](http://www.fresnocitycollege.edu)



## IRB Approval Merced Community College



3600 M Street, Merced CA 95348-2898  
(209) 384-6000  
www.mccd.edu

Office of Institutional Effectiveness  
Office: (209) 384 - 6303  
Fax: (209) 384 - 6337  
research@mccd.edu

March 10, 2020

Marie Harris, MBA  
Madera Community College  
30277 Ave 12  
Madera, CA 93638

*Congratulations. Your research protocol entitled "Lived Experiences of CA Community College African American Student-Athletes and Non-Student Athletes" has been approved by the Merced Community College District/ Merced College Institutional Review Board [IRB] via expedited review.*

This research approval is contingent on your acceptance of sole responsibility for the following:

1. Maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of the data collected;
2. Any liability arising out of breach of confidentiality/anonymity;
3. Ensuring that students under the age of 18 are not a part of your study.

Please Note:

*Human subjects research liability protection from the College only covers IRB-approved research by faculty, students, and employees of Merced College. If your employment or student status changes during the year or if you make changes to your methods, subject selection, or instrumentation, please discontinue your research and notify the IRB to obtain the appropriate clearances.*

If any research participant experiences a serious adverse or unexpected event during or following participation, please notify the IRB administrator immediately.

Best Regards,

Komsal Bandyopadhyay  
Dean of Institutional Effectiveness  
Merced College

## APPENDIX I

### Participant's Bill of Rights



#### BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

##### Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.