ResearchGate

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269990143

Motivational Factors for Academic Success: Perspectives of African American Males in the Community College

Article · December 2014

CITATIONS
6

READS
277

3 authors:

Terence Hicks
East Tennessee State University
34 PUBLICATIONS **246** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

J. Luke Wood
San Diego State University
53 PUBLICATIONS **846** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

Adriel A. Hilton
Webster University
17 PUBLICATIONS **169** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

A meta-synthesis of academic and social characteristic studies: First-generation college students in STEM disciplines at HBCUs View project

Urban Education View project

All content following this page was uploaded by Terence Hicks on 25 December 2014.

The user has requested enhancement of the downloaded file.

Motivational Factors for Academic Success: Perspectives of African American Males in the Community College

J. Luke Wood, Adriel Hilton and Terence Hicks

Author Information

J. Luke Wood
Assistant Professor
San Diego State University
San Diego CA

Adriel A. Hilton
Director
Center for African American
Research & Policy

Terence Hicks
Dean
The Whitlowe R. Green
College of Education
Prairie View A&M University

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 3,
WINTER 2014

THE NATIONAL
JOURNAL OF URBAN
EDUCATION & PRACTICE

Abstract

This study examined motivational factors affecting the academic success of Black males. Specifically, this study focused on the perspectives of African American male students in the community college. Using a qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 Black male students. Students were asked to describe factors they believe affected their academic success. The vast majority of students (24 of 28) discussed motivational factors as supportive mechanisms for their success. Students noted that motivational factors provided them with inspiration to succeed academically. Several motivation factors emerged from the interviews: (a) career goals; (b) proving others (naysayers) wrong; (c) creating a better future for oneself and one's family; (d) responsibility to others (family, friends, children) to succeed, including making one's family proud; and (e) students' interest in their academic coursework.

Keywords: Black, Males, Community College

Motivational Factors for Academic Success: Perspectives of African American Males in the Community College

"...more must be done to motivate, encourage, and reinforce more young Black men to perform well in the classroom. While negative peer pressure tends to diminish African American males' propensity to succeed academically, that influence can be reduced, if not entirely eliminated, by ver-

Copyright TSU/TAMU 2014, All rights reserved.

bally and materially rewarding academic achievement in the same way that society acknowledges and even extols athletic performance. When we publicly recognize the successful academic experiences of young African American men, we simultaneously raise their self- concept, self-esteem, and academic confidence" (Garibaldi, 1992, p. 7).

These words penned by Antoine Garibaldi extol the importance of motivation in the education of Black[1] students. He called for educators to recognize the central role they have in influencing the academic success of Black students through individual praise, public recognition and even material rewards. While Garibaldi's comments focused on the need to motivate African American students in K-12, the dismal academic performance of Black males throughout the educational pipeline (preK-20) indicates the importance of understanding the relationship between motivation and education at all academic levels. As indicated by his quote, Garibaldi's comments focused on the importance of external motivational factors. External motivators include support for student success that originates 'external' to the student. These factors include encouragement from teachers, family, community members, and other educational stakeholders. While external factors are certainly important contributors to student success, Hwang, Echols and Vrongistinos (2002) have noted that Black students are motivated by both internal and external factors. As such, a student's internal drive to succeed can serve as an important mechanism for academic success as well.

With the importance of internal and external factors in mind, this study examined motivational factors affecting the academic success[2] of Black males. Specifically, this study focused on the perspectives of African American male students in the community college. Using a qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 Black male students. Students were asked to describe factors they believe affected their academic success. The vast majority of students (24 of 28) discussed motivational factors as mechanisms for their success. Students noted that motivational factors provided them with inspiration to succeed academically. Several motivation factors emerged from the interviews: (a) career goals; (b) proving others (naysayers) wrong; (c) creating a better future for oneself and one's family; (d) responsibility to others (family, friends, children) to succeed, including making one's family proud; and (e) students' interest in their academic coursework. This manuscript explicates the intricacies of each factors identified. The findings derived from this investigation are interpreted through previous research and the theoretical framework (Self-Determination Theory) which guided this study.

Previous Research and Theoretical Lens

Numerous scholars have investigated the Black male experience in higher education (Allen, 1986; Cuyjet, 1994; Harper, Carini, Bridges & Hayek, 2004; Harvey, 2002; Perrakis, 2008). Research on these students illustrates several areas of concern, including Black males': inadequate preparation for collegiate coursework, low transition rates from high school to college, as well as poor retention and graduation rates (Allen, 1992; Cuyjet, 2006; Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hamp-

[1] The terms African American and Black are used interchangeably.

[2] Academic Success- refers to students' grade point averages and successful completion of classes towards their degree goals.

ton, 2001-02). While representing a smaller body of literature (see Wood, 2010) research on African American males in the community college[3] illustrates similar areas of concern, such as low enrollment, persistence, graduation, academic success, and transfer rates (Brown, 2007; Fortson, 1994; Jordan, 2008; Pope, 2006; Stevens, 2006; Wilkins, 2005). For instance, first year persistence rates for Black males (73.6 percent) trail those of White, Hispanic, and Asian American males (74.7, 76.9, and 90.6 percent respectively)[4] (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Poor performance on measures of student success (e.g., persistence, graduation, transfer) may be cause for alarm, given that the vast majority of African American males who enroll in post-secondary education (63.1 percent) do so through public and private two-year colleges (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

As noted, there is a minimal body of extant research on African American male success (e.g., persistence, graduation, academic achievement, transfer) in the community college. Most of the studies which do exist are in the form of doctoral dissertations (see Wood, 2010). These studies of Black male academic success have focused on the importance of background/defining variables (e.g., parent's education, high school G.P.A, finances), academic variables (e.g., studying, academic advising, tutoring); environmental variables (e.g., family responsibilities, employment), and social variables (e.g., mentorship, friendships, athletic commitments) (see Glenn, 2003-04; Hagedorn et al., 2001-02; Mosby, 2009; Perrakis, 2008; Rideaux, 2004; Riley, 2007). Fewer studies have given attention to the effect of psychological variables on student success (Harris & Wood, 2013). Those studies that provide findings relevant to this investigation of motivation are addressed.

Jordan (2008) examined motivational factors for Black males in the community college. Jordan found that external motivation from faculty was supported by a demeanor where students' ideas, thoughts, and being were affirmed. Jordan juxtaposed this approach with that of faculty who did not take time to develop positive relationships with students, noting that such faculty were less effective with motivating Black male students. As indicated by Jordan's research, Black male students (like their peers) perform better in circumstances where they feel valued and affirmed. Similarly, Stevens (2006) noted that Black male students experiencing stereotype threat persisted at lower rates than their peers. Stevens suggested that lower persistence rates were a result of demotivation, as these men disengaged from coursework for fear of reflecting negatively on their race.

Prior qualitative research on Black men has shown family obligations to be a strong motivational factor for student success (Beckles, 2008; Ihekwaba, 2001). This research suggests that Black men were more motivated to succeed in community college when they were providing for their families or believed they were serving as role models to others. Moreover, this research has also indicated that Black men were also motivated by the aim of making other individuals (e.g., fellow students', children, immediate family, their ancestors, non-biological family) proud of their academic accomplishments. These

[3] This study uses the terms community colleges and two-year colleges interchangeably to refer to public and private degree granting institutions where the highest degree *commonly* awarded is an associate's degree. This definition is inclusive of community colleges which offer *some* baccalaureate degree programming.

[4] It should be noted that American Indian males have the lowest one year persistence rates at dismal 53.5 percent. Data for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students could not be presented due to sample size limitations.

findings are complicated by quantitative research from Wood (2012) and Wood and Williams (2013) who noted that family obligations are negative predictors of Black male persistence. Thus, while a responsibility to family can motivate Black men to succeed, it can also serve to pull them away from their academic obligations.

Theoretical Lens

This study is guided by the theoretical lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). According to Ryan and Deci (2000), SDT investigates individuals' self-motivation in light of their personality integration. In particular, it examines how individuals are motivated towards activities, processes, values, and behaviors to fulfill inherent psychological needs (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick & Leone, 2006; Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 1999). SDT is grounded in the notion that three inherent psychological needs affect and motivate human behavior, they include competence (understanding how to obtain desired outcomes and the ability to perform functions which can attain said outcomes), relatedness (the importance of developing and sustaining social bonds, (especially those which promote feelings of safety, support, and satisfaction), and autonomy (the capacity and aptitude to control one's own actions) (Deci, Connell & Ryan, 1989). Self-determination theorists postulate that individuals are motivated when there is an opportunity to actualize one or more of these three inherent needs (Deci & Ryan, 2004).

As noted by Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier and Ryan (1991) when applied to educational contexts, SDT is used as a lens to understand and advance students' internalized interest in, and value for schooling. It is also employed as a mechanism for the promotion of a positive self-efficacy. SDT advances psychosocial research on internalized motivation by making a distinction between self-determined and compliant factors and processes. Self-determined motivation occurs when one acts based solely upon personal volitional choice (Deci & Ryan, 1991). This contrasts compliant motivation where external factors (or forces) serve to guide, control, and regulate one's choice (Deci et al., 1991). Previous research illustrates the importance of internal motivation. Scholars have found that students with internal motivation learn more effectively and have greater initiative than students with an external motivation (Amabile, 1996; Utman, 1997).

Deci and Ryan (1985) noted that the one's external motivation is guided by their internalization. Internalization is a psychosocial process by which external messages or stimuli are imbued and integrated into one's internal drive (Deci, 1975; 1976; Deci et al., 2001; Deci & Ryan, 2000). For example, a Black collegian majoring in English may not be interested in a general education course (e.g., Math, Science) which seems disconnected from their major or other areas of interest. Thus, a student in this circumstance could lack an intrinsic motivation to perform at a high academic level in such coursework. As a result, students may be externally motivated to perform well through lauding from faculty. However, motivation can become internalized where external praise declines in importance and students are self-motivated to achieve academically. When this occurs, the locus of causality (the origin of the motivation) is within the student (internal locus of causality) as opposed to within the faculty (external locus of causality). However, this is not to suggest that motivation is binary, either having an internal or external causality. Rather, motivation factors are complex, as individuals can be simultaneously motivated by a confluence

of differing factors which are internally and externally situated.

External motivation exists in four primary forms, ranging on a continuum from external regulation (lowest level of self-determination) to integrated regulation (highest level of self-determination). External regulation refers to motivation which occurs outside one's personal volition. Rewards and punishments are reinforced by external actors (e.g., faculty, administrators) who serve to guide individual's adherence to processes, values, and expectations. However, the motivation is not internalized or self-initiated. Introjected regulation is the second-lowest level of self- determination. In this form of regulation, individuals begin to envelop external motivation though it is not internalized or self-initiated. Adherence to external motivation is based, at least in part, to internal coercion whereby students avoid behaviors that are contrary to expected values and processes (Black & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

As students transition towards higher levels of self-determination they exhibit behaviors of identified regulation. Identified regulation takes place when external regulations are integrated into an individual's value system. As such, external expectations become more self-initiated, and as a result, are more willingly adhered to. At the highest level of self-determination is integrated regulation. Integrated regulation occurs when external motivations are internalized and wholly self-initiated. In such cases, guidelines are followed because they are believed in and valued (Deci et al., 1991; 1999).

As a noted by Deci et al. (1991), integrated regulation and intrinsic motivation are both self-determined but differ in rationale. Integrated regulation is motivated by students' desire to achieve a specified outcome. Thus, students' internalization of external expectations, while personally valued, are based upon the achievement of an identified end. In contrast, intrinsic motivation occurs when students' motivation is based upon a true interest in, and desire to adhere to expectations, as opposed to an identified goal (Deci et al., 1994). This does not suggest intrinsic motivation cannot have positive outcomes; rather, that these outcomes are not the driving impetus for self-determination. Intrinsic motivation can be manifested in several ways, including intellectual stimulation or curiosity, the drive to overcome a challenge, and the desire for personal betterment (Black & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Griffin (2006) used SDT to investigate explanatory models useful in understanding the academic motivation of high achieving Black collegians. She found that the students in her study were best characterized as integrated regulators in that they were internally motivated by external phenomena. In particular, she found three primary factors which supported student motivation, students' desire to: a) attain their career objectives; b) make family members proud; and c) serve as a "positive representative of Black community" (p. 395). Interestingly, Griffin did not find students to be intrinsically motivated. Thus, students did not discuss motivation due to a purely internalized desire to learn, be challenged, or better oneself. Findings from this study will be compared to Griffin's in the discussion section. The next section provides an overview of the methodology used in this study.

Methodology

Findings presented in this paper are drawn from a larger study of academic success which examined many constructs (e.g., social, environmental, background/defining, aca-

demic, psychological) impacting students' academic success. Interviews were conducted with 28 African American male students attending a community college in the Southwestern United States. Students were asked to describe factors affecting their academic success in college. A qualitative research design was selected to provide insight to the unique realities and perspectives of Black male students as evidenced through their own voices (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Research Site and Participants

This study was conducted at Star Valley Community College (SVCC)[5], a mid-sized[6] community college located in the Southwestern United States. SVCC serves a diverse student population; the racial/ethnic makeup of their student body is as follows: White 39 percent, American Indian 1 percent, Black 8 percent, Asian 4 percent, Hispanic 32 percent, and Other 16 percent. While African American students represent 8 percent of the campus student population, this number includes only 148 African American males (approximately 14-15 percent of the total Black student enrollment). Thus, the 28 interviews conducted in this study represent 19 percent of the total Black male population at this research site. SVCC is a Minority Serving Institution, "a term used to describe the groups of institutions that enroll a high proportion of African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students" (O'Brien & Zudak, 1998, p.5). In particular, SVCC serves a high percentage of Hispanic students; therefore it is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI).

Participation guidelines required interviewees to meet several criteria: 1) self-identification as an African American male; 2) at least 18 years of age or more; and 3) enrollment (part-time or full-time) at SVCC as a student within the last two years. Students represented a diverse set of African American male students. While the average age of participants was 24.5 years old, participants' ages ranged from 18 to 58. Students also represented diverse majors including: criminology, culinary arts, biology, psychology, and business. Of these majors, business was the most common major track among students. Students also represented a diverse set of pre-SVCC educational experiences. While the majority of students attended high school prior to SVCC (16 in all), eight had previously attended another community college, and reverse transferred from four-year universities. In terms of degree goals, five students desired to earn associate's degrees, nine planned on earning and associate's degree and transferring to a university; and seven planned to transfer without an associate's degree.

Data Collection

A semi-structure interview approach was used in this study. According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), semi-structured interviews are "generally organized around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee/s" (p. 315). The interview protocol also included pre-planned probes which allowed the researchers to provide additional questions related to each primary question (Brenner, 2006). Further, this approach served to enhance the comparability of data across participants by minimizing the researchers' impact on the participants' answers

[5] SVCC is a pseudonym

[6] Approximately 13,000 students attend SVCC

on follow-up questions by maintaining a standardized protocol (Johnson & Christenson, 2004). Prior to each interview, students were given a blank piece a paper and asked to depict the factors that they believe affected their academic success. Students were informed that they could depict these factors in any fashion (e.g., poetry, drawing, listing). This unstructured concept mapping approach allowed participants to consider interview topics before beginning the actual interview. It also allowed them time to evaluate the relationship between concepts, ideas, and phenomena associated with academic success factors (Zanting, Verloop & Vermunt, 2003). Students were able to refer to concept maps as reference points during the interview; the maps were used as supplemental data to guide the researchers' coding process.

Participants were recruited through three forms of non-probabilistic sampling. First, the researchers used a maximum variation sampling technique. This technique purposely samples a diverse population of participants with the intention of identifying themes that are shared across differences (Merriam, 1998). As a result, participants in this study were purposely included who represented varying majors, ages, and degree goals. Second, participants were recruited through a convenience sampling. Convenience sampling allows researchers to identify and recruit participants that are easily acquired (Gay, 1996). This approach can range from the exploitation of researchers personal networks to direct contact recruitment with participants. Given that the researchers were not known to participants prior to this study, direct contact through tabling in the campus quad during lunchtime was used. Third, the researchers also employed snowball sampling, a technique where individuals refer other individuals for participation in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). All participants are referred to via pseudonyms in this article.

Data Analysis

Data from this study were analyzed using a systematic data analysis technique. This technique allows researchers to identify a core list of pre-predicted codes, research questions, hypotheses, theoretical/conceptual lenses, and methods of analysis prior to data collection (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994). After each interview, the researchers made field notes and wrote down reflections associated with the research topic. This served to organize the data collection and analysis process. Using the predetermined codes, the researchers engaged in an iterative process of coding and reflection to fully develop codes and to identify codes not pre-predicted. During the coding process, memoing was employed to indicate how quotes related to pre-predicted and newly identified themes. After data collection ceased, the researchers engaged in a data reduction process. In this process of postulating and confirming conclusions, the researchers were able to identify the themes most central to students' perspectives on academic success.

Several validity measures were employed to increase the reliability of research findings, this included inter-coder reliability, member checks, and bracketing. To employ inter-coder reliability, the researchers read and coded select portions of the interview transcripts. Then, after coding selected section, themes were cross-checked to ensure congruence in coding. Member-checks were also employed in this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that member checks occur when participants are given an opportunity to correct, verify and challenge the research findings. In this study, results were shared with

participants through a focus group format. This format allowed the researchers to present the findings, ask for clarification, and gain participants' input on the accuracy and interpretation of findings. Input received from the member-check focus group was incorporated into the final study findings. In addition to inter-coder reliability and member checks, the researchers also used bracketing. Bracketing is a qualitative research technique which requires researchers to acknowledge and set aside preconceived notions and assumptions. This practice reduces the influence of the researcher on the researcher process (Ahern, 1999).

Findings

The vast majority of participants (24 of 28) discussed motivation as an important factor affecting their academic success. Students described numerous motivational factors which they perceived as contributing to their desire to succeed in school. It should be noted that very few students discussed factors that detracted from their motivation in school. In fact, too few students discussed negative factors to warrant their presentation as themes. These negative factors included overly strict teachers, death in the family, substance abuse, and tough academic workload. The vast majority of participants described positive motivational factors which contributed to their academic success, including: (a) career goals; (b) proving others (naysayers) wrong; (c) creating a better future for oneself and one's family; (d) a responsibility to others (family, friends, children) to succeed, including making one's family proud; and (e) students' interest in their academic coursework.

Motivational factors described in this section originated from an internal locus of causality, though they were both internally and externally motivated. Internal motivation is directly related to academic success, as explained by Alfred: "You have to do this yourself; there is nobody there to push you. It's self-motivation. If you want to go and succeed and get A's, then that is what you want do to". Alfred further explained that motivational factors are particularly important since students will encounter pitfalls and circumstances that require them to overcome obstacles in pursuit of academic success. Pointing to his concept map, he stated, "That's why I put self-motivation and determination in there too. You have to have the self-motivation, or do you want more, and your determination to get through when those barriers come up."

Career Goals

Several students discussed their career goals as motivational factors for their academic success. Students noted their desire to achieve their goals and their mental perceptions of what life would be like in their career of choice. Frederick likened his career goal of becoming a nurse to a carrot, explaining, "You have to see the carrot that is dangling; you have to know the reason why you are going for, you know, why you are going down the path that you are." Similarly, Calvin stated, "My goal is to become a police officer. Like that's something I really wanna do, so that pretty much helps me focus." Akin to Calvin, Josh remarked "I'm striving myself to, you know, get to that point where I want to, you know, maybe own my own business one day or, you know, really help people out in life with being a physical therapist assistant."

Of all the students who discussed this theme, Anthony went into the most detail. Anthony is a culinary arts major. In high school, he enrolled in physical education as an elective course. However, he was doing

very poorly in the classroom. Anthony did not like to get sweaty, so he refused to dress into his gym clothes. A combination of not dressing down for class and poor attendance caused the school counselor to offer him an alternative class—culinary arts. At first, Anthony was placed into the class on a temporary basis to see if he would like it. After a short period of time, it was a permanent fit. The class positively affected Anthony's dedication in school and his career path. He spoke extensively about how his high school teacher from his culinary arts class helped him to realize his dreams. He referred to his teacher affectionately as a "good friend" upon whom he can rely if he has a need. When asked about his vision for himself in ten years, Anthony responded by connecting his career path to his motivation to achieve in college:

> Where do I see myself 10 years from now? Honestly, I mean I can't really tell what the future holds, you know. But, I want to see myself in somebody's restaurant cooking some great dishes for people to eat. You know, people telling me, "yeah, you cook real good." Me wearing my chef coat–that's what I really want to do. I just want to wear my chef coat. I mean, honestly, I mean the only thing that I really just hope for right now is just getting to wear my chef coat. I have a chef coat at home sitting [in] my closet, sitting there collecting dust. My high school teacher gave it to me… I have this little jacket in my closet, and I just really want to wear that 'cause once I wear that, once I have that on and I'm in someone's kitchen and I have that on, then I can actually tell myself I made it.

Clearly, the chef's coat that Anthony received from his teacher served as a summative symbol of career success and a continual reminder about why he was in school.

Another student who discussed career goals as a positive motivation for success was Matt. Matt described the importance of his education, noting that it directly related to his current and future plans. Matt reported that he and his business partner were in the beginning stages of developing a janitorial service. Their goal is for the service to become a franchise with multiple locations. To enhance his efforts, Matt is majoring in finance and marketing, and he plans on double majoring in both areas at the university level. He is applying the knowledge he has learned in the classroom to fulfill his dream. As evidenced in this section, all the students who discussed the theme of career goals were situated in the integrated regulation stage of SDT. While their locus of causality was internalized they were extrinsically motivated in that their motivation was based on attaining a desired end.

Proving Others Wrong

Several students spoke about their desire to prove others wrong. They noted that this motivated them to do well in school. For these students, barriers and low-expectations of their performance were viewed as challenges that motivated them to succeed. Frank was one student who spoke about this concept at length. Several times during his interview, he explained that he was unlike what others expected of him. Frank noted that he had worked hard to prove others wrong with respect to him becoming like his father. Frank was raised by his mother and had only seen his father a couple times in his life. One time when he was young, Frank stayed at his father's house. According to Frank, his father lived in filth, referred to bugs as his friends, and peed in milk cans. Frank referenced his father several times as a "bum" and a "thug" and stated, "I promised myself I would never

be like him." Frank also spoke of the neighborhood he lived in, noting that drive-by shootings and other forms of crime were common. He described how many people from this neighborhood were in jail because of criminal activity. Bearing his father and his neighborhood in mind, Frank stated:

> But I realize either I don't get an education and end up being like my dad, or some kind of uh, bum, or thug or so on etcetera. Or I could go to school and better myself, so I chose to go to school.

Frank was not able to clearly articulate whom he wanted to prove wrong. However, he stated several times that his goal was to exceed expectations from others, in effect, proving them wrong. Another way in which this concept was described by Frank dealt with his health. Frank has suffered from cerebral palsy since birth. He described how "people" had told him that he would not be successful due to this disease:

> People said I wouldn't make it. I had a couple people I knew that said due to my cerebral palsy that I wouldn't be able to do a lot of things. So I kind of like to prove people wrong about that.

A few students discussed the notion of proving others wrong in relationship to issues of race. They noted that stereotypes about Black men being unsuccessful in school have motivated them. More specifically, they were motivated by perceptions that Black men don't attend college and those who do eventually drop out. These students stated that stereotypes served as a source of motivation where they set out to prove the stereotypes wrong. For instance, Jake described how statistical data regarding African American male dropout rates motivated him to succeed in college. During the course of his interview, he stated that there were very few African Americans on campus, "I thought about it. Like I was okay, well if I am going to be here, I should finish because I don't want to be like one of those statistics."

Martin also discussed the theme of proving others wrong. He spoke about being successful throughout his educational experience. When asked if his previous academic performance affected his college performance, he responded:

> It's served as motivation. Because like you know as a Black man, I've seen a lot of Black people just, like you know, finish high school. That's it for them; you know what I'm saying? And you know they go and you know they don't do nothing; they don't pursue a higher education; they don't go get a job.

Martin went on to speak about his friend as an example of Black men. He described having a friend who graduated from high school with him. According to Martin, this friend now stays at home, does not work, and "isn't doing anything with his life." Martin did not want to be like his friend or like other Black men who he felt fit this model. His goal was to be different and succeed in school. Invariably, students who were motivated by proving others wrong illustrated a perceived internal locus of causality. Further, given that their motivation was based upon a desired challenge to overcome perceptions, their responses represented intrinsically motivated self-determination.

Creating a Better Future

A number of interviewees discussed their desire to create a better future for themselves and for their families. They noted that this served as a motivational factor for their academic success. In fact, many students provided elaborate examples of what a better future meant to them, describing their future homes, financial stability, families (e.g., wife, chil-

dren), animals, and luxuries (e.g., food, automobile). For example, Zachary explained that this study's interview protocol was incomplete. He informed the researchers that they needed to ask students where they would see themselves 10 to 15 years from the present[7]. He then explained,

> I see myself, like I said, in a big house, white picket fence with a dog named Bill, a Labrador named Bill. And I'm just retiring; I'm resting, like I did my work. You know what I'm saying, I did what I had to do, you know what I'm saying, to show people that it's good to live in the good life. I mean, I could still be out there doin' what I had to do, gang banging, don't give an F about nobody, but how can I do that. My pa didn't do that to me.

Isaac also discussed his dreams for a better future. However, unlike Zachary, he presented two possible futures, explaining that getting through college was the determining factor between the two. The first outcome was that of success. He compared success to being in an arena in box seats, noting that he wanted to be in the oldest box with Bill Gates. He further described his box seat, noting it "got the caviar, the champagne, the nice jets and all." He contrasted success with that of failure, comparing a potential outcome to being in the "nosebleed seat[s] and living in 'poverty." Zachary equated failure to working at McDonalds, being a street sweeper, digging ditches, or being an electrician. He noted that while these were respectable jobs, he did not want himself or others to do blue collar work at 60 or 70 years old.

It is important to note that the theme of creating a better future was often contextual. Meaning that the current socio-cultural realities of students shaped their future aspirations. One important element of students' realities were the national fiscal landscape (the interviews presented here were conducted several years into the 'great recession'). Joel discussed how the national economic landscape motivated him to create a better future for himself and avoid the troubles that others who had not attended college had endured. He stated:

And then also, what motivates me is like feeling like I'll have security in the future because, I know lots of people right now, with the whole economic problems, I know they're having a lot of financial trouble buying houses and stuff like that.

Similarly, other students commented on the economic conditions, noting that they had witnessed particularly acute effects of the turndown, which heightened their attentiveness towards their future outcomes.

Students who spoke about creating a better future did so in two overlapping ways. Some spoke specifically about creating a better future for themselves and creating one for their families. Matt was one of the students who spoke about improving his own future. Matt has a wife and three children and attends college full-time. Prior to attending college, Matt worked at the Target distribution center moving boxes. He noted that a few years of this work had made his back and body hurt continuously. On several occasions, Matt attempted to become a manager, but was passed over. He attributed his lack of promotion to racism. Matt was worried that the job itself was destroying his body and envisioned a poor future for himself if he did not attend and succeed in college, as he explained:

> My back hurt. My body hurt. You know what I'm saying? The only thing

7 Since Zachary was one of the first few interviewees this question was added to the interview protocol.

> that's not being exercised daily is my mind. And to me, what I'm gonna be, what I'm gonna be buff with a six-pack, sitting in the Alzheimer unit, or you know, I just visualize stuff like that. I can't go like this forever. Your body gonna wear and tear. You need to take care of it. You need to; it's your temple. You need to love it. You need to, you know, do what you can… All that came into play and I just said you know what, f**k it, I'm goin' to school, and that's what brought me here on the doorsteps of Star Valley Community College. Humbled, humbled, humbled and empty.

While Matt and others focused on producing a better future for themselves, several students were focused on providing a better life for their families. Mark talked about helping his family by providing for their basic needs, explaining: "Might not just be like finances, just the fact like if I could just get 'em into a house or something, just a roof over their head and some food in their stomach." He said that his goal was to provide his family with the same standard of living that he would have once he succeeded in school. Martin also spoke of helping his family. His motivation to succeed in college is an example of how career goals and a desire to provide a better future for himself and for his family can be interdependent. In this regard, he stated,

> And then—and the incentives, of attaining my degree, I put that for more specifically because of the career I want to get into, which I, I decided now is probably going to be in banking, you know, just a career in banking, you know. I just want to see how far that gets me, you know. And plus the money obviously you know. And but you know, just to be able to, you know, support my family, help out my family, you know what I'm saying? Because you know, I want to take them out to dinner, you know, show them appreciation for what they've done for me over these years.

Students who discussed the importance of providing a better future for themselves and their families illustrated an internally perceived locus of causality. While they all demonstrated self-determined behavior, their actions were extrinsically motivated in that their drive was based upon a desired end (e.g., future homes, financial stability). As a result, these students' regulatory styles were indicative of integrated regulation.

Responsibility to Others

A number of students attributed their academic motivation to a responsibility to others and/or their desire to be a role model. Zachary talked extensively about his desire to be a role model for his brothers and sisters, specifically his nine-year-old sister. He referred to her as his "motivation" on several occasions. He also noted that his enrollment and success in college was especially important since his father was murdered and he was now serving as a father figure for his brothers and sisters. Zachary noted that during his father's funeral, he became aware that his brothers and sisters did not have the opportunity to know their father like he did. In this regard, he stated:

> Seein' me, I'm a role model to my baby brothers and sis 'cause like I said, on my dad's side, they had they daddy, but on my mom's side, they didn't have no daddy. So they look at me as their daddy, and whatever I do, they watch, you know what I'm saying. So, when they see me in school, see me doing my education and stuff.

Zachary noted that his brothers and sisters inquired regularly about whether he was still in college and how he was doing. He stated

that his siblings are closely watching him and explained that he is doing the best he can to show them how to be successful students and people.

Terrence also spoke about a responsibility to others as a motivating factor for academic success. However, his focus was on being a role model to his friends who were serving in the armed forces. According to Terrence, many of his friends joined the military so they could afford college. Their goal was to serve in the military and use veterans' funds to finance college. Terrence noted that he was fortunate because he had received scholarship funds that allowed him to go to college without having to pursue other means of funding. His goal was to show his friends that college was a plausible pathway to pursue after their tenure in the military was over. He also described wanting to be a role model for friends who did not go into the military or attend college:

> One is that I benefit from my friends because, you know, some are in the military and things like that. I am being an example to them by going so they can see that it is something they can do too, after they get out. Some, at least some of my friends, aren't going to school right now. I am trying to talk them into going, so I am living out the example instead of just, you know, just saying something. It makes me want to go harder in my studies because I know people are looking at me. Whether I like it or not, there are people who are looking at me and what I am doing. So, I want to be the type of person that says, "Yes, I got B's and A's and such, especially in my class, because I don't want to say that I just glided through, you know with like D's or C's or something like that.

Terrence noted that his desire to show his friends that they could be successful in college placed added pressure on him. He stated that his passion to attain success drives him to work harder than he would otherwise. Zachary, Terrence and the many other students who discussed this theme illustrate a perceived internal locus of causality. Zachary's self-determined actions were representative of an extrinsic motivation with an integrated regulatory style. However, Terrence is representative of several students whose motivation and regulatory style were difficult to classify. While in part, motivation to show collegiate success to friends is extrinsically motivated, Terrence's comments could also be interpreted as intrinsically motivated and regulated in that he enjoyed the intellectual challenge of doing well. His actions were almost juxtaposed to those in the proving others wrong theme, in that his goal was to prove to others that he was 'right.'

Interesting Courses

A large segment of students noted that they found their courses to be very interesting. Their interest in their coursework served as a motivational factor for their academic success. These students were invigorated by the excitement of their intellectual development and stimulation; several even spoke of an inherent 'love for learning.' For example, students stated the following (italics added for emphasis):

> *I love to learn,* so I think this is pretty cool, that you learn past high school. Right here, I put wanting to be better; I always think it is better to just achieve more that what you are and evolve past the state that you are now and to be something else. (Terrence)

> Like math is one of my strong subjects. *I just love problem solving*, and that's what, that's why I tend to like math

because its problems. Once you get the problems, it's like, are you getting like the solution on how to solve the problem. (Zeke)

> *Like, I love, I love my business classes,* and you know, I want to own my own nightclub one day, and so my business is helping me. I like doing, like, little business plans and learning the rules in business management and all of that. I kind of like that. (Danny)

Students discussed varying reasons for interest in their coursework. While some identified faculty members who had employed pedagogy to make their classes more enjoyable, most simply noted that they were excited by the "power" that came from learning new things. For example, Mark noted that he believes "knowledge is power." Thus, he stated that his goal was to gain as much power (knowledge) as he could for himself. Similarly, Aaron noted that he wanted to learn as much as he could about his major, culinary arts. He stated that learning how to cook, properly cut food, and use knives was fun. Matt spoke about knowledge in a different way. He likened himself to an empty glass, noting that he came to the institution to become a "full glass," filled with knowledge. He said, "I came here like, mold me, shape me, show me, you know."

Responses from students regarding interesting coursework present a clear example of intrinsically motivated, self-determined behavior. Students illustrated intrinsically regulatory styles based upon a genuine interest in intellectual stimulation resulting from their coursework. They were motivated by a love for learning which according to SDT is the highest level of self-determined behavior.

Discussion and Conclusion

A number of salient findings emerged from this research. This study found that the motivational factors described by participants originated (predominantly) from an internal locus of causality. That being said, the men in this study described instances of being both internally and externally motivated. Several core themes emerged on the manifestations of motivation for Black male students in the community college. A primary contribution of this study to the greater literature on Black men is the notion that creating a better future for oneself and one's family served as a core motivation for success. This is a particularly salient theme given that the media has long employed a more deficit-oriented depiction of Black men as hedonistic, uncaring, apathetic, and unable to delay gratification. This finding presents an alternative narrative, one where Black men are motivated by a balance ethic of care for self and others.

The study found that students' career goals served as a motivational factor. Students discussed their mental perceptions of how their career would be drove their persistence and success in school. Generally, students in this study were in the integrated regulation stage of SDT. These findings are similar to those of Griffin (2006) who found that students were motivated to achieve their career objectives. Griffin also found that making family members proud served as a source of inspiration. This study found a similar finding but also identified students' desire to make friends and deceased ancestors proud as well. However, unique to this study was that the focus on making others proud was embodied within a larger theme of a responsibility to others. In particular, men in this study noted that they served as role models to siblings, children, and peers.

In addition, Griffin found that serving, as a positive Black community representative was a motivational factor for students, especially in environments rife with stereotypes about Black students. This finding is also in line with research from Moore, Madison-Colmore & Smith (2007) who identified the prove-them-wrong syndrome. Specifically, the prove-them-wrong syndrome suggests that successful Black men (particularly in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) are aware of racism and negative stereotypes about them. These men, illustrate a high internal locus of control, and as a result, are driven to prove others (particularly White faculty and students) wrong by illustrating a greater commitment to their course of study, enhanced self-confidence (academic self-efficacy), greater determination, improved work ethic, and a clearer sense of their academic purpose. This research produced a similar finding in that students noted the importance of proving naysayers wrong (especially those with negative perceptions of African Americans). However, for the students in this study, while proving others wrong was associated with their identities as Black men, this theme was not solely restricted to White faculty and peers but to any individual (including family members) who disregarded them.

Interestingly, while Griffin did not find academically successful students to be intrinsically motivated by an internalized desire to learn or be intellectually challenged; this study identified a number of students who stated that they were motivated to succeed by a genuine interest in their academic coursework. This represents the highest level of self-determined behavior. This study was unable to determine whether there were underlying factors (e.g., major type, previous schooling) that served to provide students with this source of motivation. Given this circumstance, future research should examine whether this study's intrinsic motivation findings are replicable in other settings. They should also determine whether intrinsic motivation differs by institutional type (e.g., four year university, community college), student type (e.g., high achieving, low achieving), and region.

Motivation is a unique concept which has been addressed by researchers in different ways. Scholars such as Bean and Metzner (1985), Mason (1994, 1998), and Tinto (1975), have identified distinct aspects of student motivation (e.g., utility, educational goals) and separated them as unique factors in their models. In contrast, Ihekwaba (2001) grouped a number of motivational factors (e.g., degree goals, meeting families' expectations, prosperity, becoming a competitive candidate for employment, and social mobility) as personal motivators. Either way, based upon findings from this study, it is clear that there are multiple overlapping factors which serve to motivate students towards academic success. As a result, future research should continue to explore these factors. Quantitative measures can be employed to determine their degree of association with various measures of student success (e.g., persistence, academic success, graduation, transfer).

As noted in the opening quote from Garibaldi, educators can play a role in motivating students toward success. With respect to career goals, institutional personnel should use all interactions with students as opportunities to inform and reassure them that their educational pursuits are worth the investment. In the classroom, for example, faculty can communicate this message by informing students of the benefits of an education, in general, and in their specific field (e.g., business, culinary, engineering). Students should be in-

formed of both personal (e.g., financial, intellectual) and societal benefits (e.g., civic engagement, tax base) (Nevarez & Wood, 2010). In terms of ensuring students are interested in their classes/programs, faculty members must work arduously to improve their pedagogy. This can be accomplished by making their lectures applicable to the lived experiences of their students.

Overall, students interviewed in this study noted that motivation can serve to support academic success. Findings from this study illustrate the importance of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation factors in facilitating the academic success of Black males in the community college. These findings provide an important additional layer of understanding to the psychosocial literature on Black male success. Students perceived motivation as key to their success. This study found that through properly planned academic planning and individual interaction with students, motivation can be bolstered to enhance the academic success of this important student group.

References

Allen, W. R. (1986). *Gender and campus race differences in Black student academic performance, racial attitudes and college satisfaction.* Atlanta, GA: Southern Education Foundation.

Allen, W. R. (1992). The color of success: African-American college student outcomes at predominantly White and historically Black public colleges and universities. *Harvard Educational Review, 62*(1), 26-44.

Bean, J. P., & Metzner, B. S. (1985). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. *Review of Educational Research, 55*(4), 485-540.

Beckles, W. A. (2008). *Redefining the dream: African American male voices on academic success* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3314150)

Black, A. E., & Deci, E. L. (2000). The effects of instructors' autonomy support and students' Autonomous motivation on learning organic chemistry: a self-determination theory perspective. *Science Education, 84,* 740–756.

Brenner, M. E. (2006). Interviewing in educational research. In J. L. Green, G. Camilli, & P. B.

Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (pp. 357-370). Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum & Associates

Brown, T. D. (2007). *Keeping the brothers focused: A study of the impact of male mentoring on the community college level* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3274692)

Cuyjet, M. J. (1994). African American men on college campuses: Their needs and their perceptions. *New Directions for Student Services, 80,* 5-16.

Cuyjet, M. J. (2006). *Helping African American men succeed in college.* San Francisco: Jossey- Bass.

Deci, E. L. (1975). Intrinsic motivation. New York, NY: Plenum.

Deci, E. L. (1976). Notes on the theory and metatheory of intrinsic motivation. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 15,* 130–145.

Deci, E. L. Eghrari, H. & Patrick, B. C. & Leone, D. R. (2006). Facilitating internalization: The Self-Determination Theory perspective. *Journal of Personality, 62*(1), 119-142.

Deci, E. L., Connell, J. P., & Ryan, R. M. (1989). Self-determination in a work or-

ganization. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 74*, 580–590.

Deci, E. L., Koestner, R., & Ryan, R. M. (1999). A meta-analytic review of experiments examining the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 125*, 627–668.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior.* New York, NY: Plenum.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1991). A motivational approach to self: Integration in personality. In R. Dienstbier (Ed.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation: Vol. 38. Perspectives on motivation* (pp. 237-288). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry, 11*, 227–268.

Deci, E. L. & Ryan R. M. (2004). *Handbook of self-determination research.* Rochester, NY: The University of Rochester Press.

Deci, E. L., Vallerand, R. J., Pelletier, L. G., & Ryan, R. M. (1991). Motivation and education: The self-determination perspectives. *Educational psychologist, 26* (3/4), 325-346.

DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree. B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education, 40*(4), 314-321.

Faison, A. C. (1993). *The effect of autonomy and locus-of-control on the academic achievement of Black male community college students* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 9315460)

Fortson, S. B. (1994). *Evaluation of a program designed to influence academic self-concept and racial identity among African American male college students* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 9511292)

Freeman, T. L. (2003). *Theoretical model for studying year-to-year persistence of two year college students by ethnicity using the beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study 1996-98* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3094695)

Garibaldi, A. M. (1992). Educating and motivating African American males to succeed. *The Journal of Negro Education 61* (1), 4- 11.

Gay, L. R. (1996). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and application.* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Glenn, F. S. (2003-2004). The retention of Black male students in Texas public community colleges. *Journal of College Student Retention, 5*(2), 115-133.

Griffin, K. A. (2006). Striving for success: A qualitative exploration of competing theories of high-achieving Black college students' academic motivation. *Journal of College Student Development, 47*(4), 384-400.

Hagedorn, S. L., Maxwell, W., & Hampton, P. (2001-2002). Correlates of retention for African-American males in the community college. *Journal of College Student Retention, 3*(3), 243-263.

Harper, S. R., Carini, R. M., Bridges, B. K., & Hayek, J. (2004). Gender differences in student engagement among African American undergraduates at historically Black colleges and universities. *Journal of College Student Development, 45*(3), 271-284.

Harris III, F., & Wood, J. L. (2013). Student success for men of color in community

colleges: A review of published literature and research, 1998-2012. Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 6(3), 174-185.

Harvey, W. B. (2002). African American males in higher education. In J. U. Gordon (Ed.), *The Black male in White America* (pp. 13-36). New York, NY: Nova.

Huberman, A. M., & Miles, M. B. (1994). Data management and analysis. In N. K. Denzin, & Lincoln Y. S. (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 428-444). London, UK: Sage.

Hwang, Y. S., Echols, C., & Vrongistinos, K. (2002). Multidimensional academic motivation of high achieving African American students. *College Student Journal, 36* (4), 544-554.

Ihekwaba, R. H. (2001). *A comparative analysis of African American male and female students' perceptions of factors related to their persistence at a Texas community college.* University of Texas, Austin.

Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. B. (2004). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Jordan, P. G. (2008). *African American male students' success in an urban community college: A case study* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3311541)

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1999). Designing qualitative research (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mason, H. P. (1994). *The relationships of academic, background, and environmental variables in the persistence of adult African American male students in an urban community college* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 9430242)

Mason, H. P. (1998). A persistence model for African American male urban community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 22*(8), 751-760.

Merriam, S B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

Miles, M., & Huberman, A. M. (1984). *Qualitative data analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mosby, J. R. (2009). *From strain to success: A phenomenological study of the personal and academic pressures on African American male community college students* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3368203)

Moore, J. L., Madison-Colmore, O., & Smith, D. M. (2007). The prove-them-wrong syndrome: Voice from unheard African-American males in engineering disciplines. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 12* (1), 61-73.

Nevarez, C., & Wood, J. L. (2010). *Community college leadership & administration: Theory, practice and change.* New York, NY: Calvin Lang.

O'Brien, E. M., & Zudak, C. (1998). Minority serving institutions: An overview. *New Directions for Higher Education, 102,* 5-15.

Perrakis, A. I. (2008). Factor promoting academic success among African American and White male community college students. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 142,* 15-23.

Pope, M. L. (2006). Meeting the challenges to African American men at community col-

leges. In M. J. Cuyjet (Ed.), *African American men in college* (pp. 210-236). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Rideaux, L. (2004). *African American male participation at Tomball College: Barriers, outreach, and retention* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3150598)

Riley, N. M. (2007). *A steady drop will wear a hole in the rock: Feminism, the John Henry myth and the Black male experience in higher education: A persistence case study* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3291817)

Ryan, R. M. & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-Determination Theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 68-78.

Stevens, C. D. (2006). *Skating the zones: African-American male students at a predominantly White community college* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3247770)

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropouts from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research, 45*(1), 89-125.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003-04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

Wilkins, R. D. (2005). *Swimming upstream: A study of Black males and the academic pipeline* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3244696)

Wood, J. L. (2010). *African American males in the community college: Towards a model of academic success* (Doctoral dissertation). Arizona State University, Tempe AZ.

Wood, J. L. (2012). Leaving the two-year college: Predictors of Black male collegian departure. *The Journal of Black Studies, 43*(3), 303-326.

Wood, J. L., & Williams, R. (2013). Persistence factors for Black males in the community college: An examination of background, academic, social, and environmental variables. *Spectrum: A Journal of Black Men, 1*(2), 1-28.

Zanting, A., Verloop, N., & Vermunt, J. D. (2003). Using interviews and concept maps to access mentor teachers' practical knowledge. *Higher Education, 46*, 195-214.

View publication stats