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Satisfaction and Retention Among African American Men at Two-Year Community Colleges

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A large majority of African American males begin their postsecondary education careers at two-year community colleges. Prior research has focused largely on Black students at four-year institutions, and even theoretical work has assumed that influences on retention are the same at two-year and four-year institutions. Drawing on Tinto’s (1993) retention theory and Astin’s (1993) input-environment-outcome (IEO) model, this study estimated the impact of academic and social integration on retention—controlling for an array of intervening variables—based on a sample of African American males who responded to the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire. Findings suggest a statistical link between social integration and satisfaction in college; factors explained approximately 27% of the variance in the dependent variable. Implications for future policy and practice are highlighted.

Demographic changes and recent national data on the participation of historically underrepresented groups in American higher education suggest a number of significant shifts. Despite the historical legacy of colonial colleges that exclusively educated sons of White, wealthy men (Thelin, 2004), more women than men enroll in college today (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Similarly, more racial/ethnic minorities enroll in postsecondary institutions today than ever before. In 2004, the most recent year for which data are available, there were 14.8 million undergraduate students enrolled in the nation’s colleges and universities. Of these, 11% were Latinos, 6% Asian Pacific Islanders, and approximately 13% were African Americans. According to the Annual status report of minorities in higher education, college enrollment rates among Blacks increased by 43% between 1993 and 2004 (American Council on Education, 2005).

Unfortunately, increases in college enrollment are unmatched by increases in degree attainment among most racial/ethnic minorities, especially Latinos and African Americans (Mortenson Research Seminar, 2001). For instance, 1.4 million bachelor’s degrees were awarded in 2004; less than 9% of these were earned by African Americans. Degree attainment rates among African Americans have remained virtually unchanged for over a quarter of a century. Low attainment...
rates are a consequence, at least in part, of high rates of attrition or [in-] voluntary departure from college among Black students.

A combination of factors exacerbates the attrition problem for African American college students. First, prior research has stressed the importance of academic preparation for postsecondary education (Adelman, 1999; Fehrmann, Keith, & Reimers, 1987), especially among students who are at risk of dropping out of college (Horn & Chen, 1998). Countless studies have shown that African American students, particularly those who hail from urban neighborhoods (Fine, 1991; MacLeod, 1995), are disproportionately inadequately prepared for college. For instance, advanced placement (AP) courses were designed to increase students’ preparation for college; but schools serving large numbers of minority students typically offer few or no AP classes while schools in affluent neighborhoods offer 15 or more (Oakes, Rogers, Lipton, & Morrell, 2002).

Second, African Americans are disproportionately represented among low socioeconomic status ranks (Strayhorn, 2008). Although two-year community colleges tend to cost less than four-year institutions, African American students from low-income families can shoulder enormous financial burdens that ultimately compromise their commitment to earning a two-year degree (Tinto, Russo, & Kadel, 1994). Finally, African American students inherit substantially different forms of cultural capital (e.g., caring, community) (Smith, 2001) than that which is usually privileged and acknowledged in schools (e.g., competition, prestige, etc.). Consequently, Black students are left to acquire the social and cultural capital necessary to succeed in schools—representing a sort of second curriculum that they must master.

Beyond this, African American males face a confluence of challenges that may inhibit or make uncertain their opportunity for success in higher education. A number of studies have examined the degree to which academic achievement is valued among Black male social subgroups (Ford, 1996); generally, findings have been inconsistent. African American males are more likely to be placed in special education or developmental courses (Lane, 2006) and more likely to be suspended from school than any other race/gender-based subgroup (Kunjufu, 1986; Meier, Stewart, & England, 1998). Generally, Black men are often seen as an at risk population in education (Bailey & Moore, 2004; Davis, 2003; Moore, 2000). Media sources and some researchers refer to Black men as an endangered species (Gibbs, 1988; Staples, 1991) reflecting their virtual absence in social institutions such as schools and colleges on the one hand, their overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system and prisons on the other. For instance, Black men in their early 30s are nearly two times more likely to be incarcerated than to earn a bachelor’s degree (Western, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2003).

There are other challenges that may compromise the success of Black men as they move through the educational pipeline. African American males are often described using disparaging words such as threatening, uneducable, and lazy (Gibbs, 1988; Majors & Billson, 1992; Parham & McDavis, 1987), which reinforce and perpetuate negative stereotypes among educators (Bailey & Moore, 2004). This problem is exacerbated by the fact that African American men often internalize such beliefs, which, in turn, become self-defeating or “self-threatening” (Steele, 2000, p. 614). As a result of these trends, at least in part, African American men represent only 4% of the total undergraduate enrollment in the United States. Of those who enroll, less than 30% of Black male undergraduates will persist to earn their college degree (Mortenson Research Seminar, 2001); rates can be even lower at two-year community colleges (Flowers, 2006). Thus, the study of African American male student retention is an important and necessary research objective.
The literature on African American male retention is relatively scant. However, much of the attention has been given to Black men who enroll at four-year colleges (Schwartz & Washington, 2002; Spradley, 1996). Obscured in the present literature is the situation of Black men who enroll in two-year community colleges. This is surprising given the fact that nearly 50% of all Black men who enter postsecondary education begin at two-year community colleges (Chenoweth, 1998; Shinagawa & Jang, 1998). Investigating the factors that influence Black male retention at community colleges is the gap addressed by the present study.

This study attempted to measure the relationship between academic and social integration factors and satisfaction with college, a strong correlate of college student retention (Bean, 1980, 1983). Using data from the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CCSEQ), I conducted multivariate analyses to investigate the following research question: What is the relationship between background traits, institutional characteristics, degree goals, academic outcomes, measures of social integration, and satisfaction with college for African American males at two-year community colleges?

The study of Black male retention at two-year community colleges is justified further by several startling reports that appear in the popular press. First, a recent headline in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* read, “Persistence, not access, is problem for 2-year students,” based on a report by Policy Analysis for California Education (see Esters & Mosby, 2007). Authors found that approximately 25% of community college students left school after their first semester; success rates were even lower for African American males. Another report published in *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* drew upon Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data and indicated that Black male students have a graduation rate of 16%, the lowest among all minority male community college students (Esters & Mosby, 2007). In agreement, Hagedorn, Maxwell, and Hampton (2007) concluded: “The retention rates of African American men in community colleges are among the lowest of all ethnic groups nationally” (p. 7). Still the causes and cures of such disappointing trends have not been sufficiently examined. It is out of this context that the present study grew.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Predicting who will stay in college is a complex challenge. In fact, retention as a theoretical concept is a bit ambiguous and abstract. To guide our thinking about college student retention, I adopted several theoretical frameworks as “lenses” through which college student retention can be seen and understood. These include Tinto’s (1993) interactionalist theory of college-student departure and Astin’s (1993) IEO model of college impact.

A number of scholars agree that college student retention is a function of the background characteristics students bring to college, but what happens in college perhaps is most important (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). Drawing on the work of Durkheim (1951) and Van Gennep (1960), Tinto outlined an interactionalist theory of college student departure that described the longitudinal process of “dropping out” as a consequence of the meanings that students ascribe to their interactions in the academic and social realms of college. Specifically, Tinto (1975, 1987) explained that background characteristics influence students’ initial commitments to their educational goals and the institution. Commitments, then, influence the level of integration or involvement in the academic and social life of college. Finally, academic and social integration...
influences subsequent goal commitments, satisfaction with college (Bean, 1980), and ultimately persistence to degree completion. In short, the more academically and socially integrated a student is in college, the more likely s/he will be retained. Figure 1 summarizes Tinto’s theory of student retention.

The saliency of Tinto’s theory has been hotly debated. Some scholars have tested the empirical validity of Tinto’s constructs (Attinasi, 1989), while others have questioned whether his conceptualization aptly applies to students in various campus contexts such as two-year community colleges (Braxton & Hirschy, 2004; Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997). For example, critics have argued that, unlike residential students, external commitments powerfully frame community college students’ academic and social experiences (Halpin, 1990). As such, family, work, and community-related commitments (off-campus) may be seen as detractors to the college experience. That is, the comings and goings, typical of two-year commuter campuses, create a “buzzing confusion” (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004, p. 45) that can increase the likelihood of dropping out. To this end, Tinto (1987) and others caution the use of his original model on nontraditional students without first considering the extent to which it reflects their experiences.

So although important, critiques of Tinto’s theory do not reduce its usefulness in framing college student retention research. First, the theory has been widely used and “enjoys near paradigmatic stature in the study of college student departure” (Braxton, 2000, p. 2). Second, prior research has established that the model has predictive validity when applied to analyses of attrition from various types of institutions including private, selective residential campuses (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980); large, public, residential institutions (Terenzini, Lorang, & Pascarella, 1981); and two-year institutions (Bers & Smith, 1991; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983). And, while there is a considerable degree of consensus on the importance of academic integration to persistence at

![Figure 1](image-url)
two-year colleges (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Voorhees, 1987), findings with respect to social integration are consistently inconsistent and warrant additional testing. For instance, Pascarella, Smart, and Ethington (1986) found support for both constructs in two-year settings; Halpin (1990) determined that academic integration exerted more influence than social integration on persistence. Indeed, Pascarella and Chapman (1983) found no support for social integration. Consequently, researchers continue to argue for tests of the applicability of Tinto’s theory to retention at two-year colleges (Braxton et al., 2004); the present study responds to this call.

Retention theory may be limited in at least one other way. College student retention theory largely assumes that the “issues related to retention of minority students [are] similar, if not identical, to those of majority students” (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000, p. 130). On the one hand, this is inevitable as all theories are limited in their scope—they allow the researcher to “see” certain aspects while concealing others. This is often referred to as the paradox of theory; “...workable models are too complex to research and researchable models are too simplified to be useful in practice” (Parker, 1977, p. 420). Consequently, I found it necessary to lean upon an additional theoretical explanation that provided language for operationalizing precollege variables and academic and social integration (into the college environment). I settled upon Astin’s (1977, 1993) input-environment-outcome model. According to Astin’s model, inputs are background traits and attitudes that students bring with them to college (e.g., race, gender, thoughts about learning, etc.). Environment refers to the programs, strategies, and social influences that shape one’s college experience. Inputs and environmental factors interact (I × E) and have independent effects on outcomes such as retention. Thus, Astin’s IEO framework provided additional support for the selection of variables and proxies. Figure 2 outlines the contours of Astin’s conceptual frame.

To conduct the present study on the retention of African American males at community colleges, I found it necessary to review the literature on the topic. The extant literature can be categorized into one of three categories: studies on African American male collegians, studies on community college student retention, and studies that address both areas.

African American Males

A considerable amount of research has amassed identifying the plethora of challenges that Black men face throughout the educational pipeline. Black men often combat perceptions that often render them an at risk population (Bailey & Moore, 2004; Noguera, 2003); lack access to—or are actively discouraged from—participating in college prep curricula (Polite & Davis, 1999); hail from single-parent or first-generation to college backgrounds (Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998); and tend to be described with words that have negative connotations such as uneducable, endangered, dysfunctional, and lazy (Gibbs, 1988; Majors & Billson, 1992; Mincy, 1994). More
often than not, these words are internalized by Black male youth and lead to self-defeating behaviors (Steele, 1997).

Research has also explored the influence of factors on African American males’ success at traditional four-year colleges (Schwartz & Washington, 2002; Spradley, 1996). For instance, Spradley tested the relevance of Mason’s (1994) Final Conceptual Model of African American Male Persistence to a sample of 10 Black male bachelor’s degree graduates. Similar to Mason—who found that background traits, academic preparation, environmental factors, psychological outcomes, academic outcomes, and intent to leave are important predictors of retention for Black men at urban community colleges—Spradley uncovered that these factors plus social integration and goal commitment also are important for Black men at urban, four-year campuses. This leads to an important question: Are the factors that influence student retention at four-year colleges identical to those that influence community college student retention?

**Community College Student Retention**

The research on community college student retention consists of two distinct streams of scholarly inquiry. The first focuses on the success of community college students from the point of entry to associate’s degree attainment. Several factors have been shown to influence community college student retention including, but not limited to, enrollment status, socioeconomic status (SES), academic preparation, and external commitments. For instance, Al-Habeeb (1990) interviewed students, faculty members, and staff to understand why students left a community college in Oregon. Results suggest that part-time, low SES students with family/career responsibilities were negatively affected by the programs and services provided at the college. These findings are consistent with conclusions based on quantitative studies (Meznek, 1987; Patterson, 1993; Williamson & Creamer, 1988) and qualitative studies that employ alternative data collection methods such as case study (Payne, 2006).

The second stream of scholarship on community college student retention is characterized by studies that focus on the transfer function of two-year community colleges. Historically, “2-year colleges have long been touted as agencies for the democratization of opportunity in higher education” (Lucas, 1996, p. 41); generally, two-year community colleges cost less, are less selective in their admissions, and educate large numbers of historically disadvantaged groups. In addition, community colleges tend to serve those who are less academically prepared for college (Dougherty, 1992) and those who desire to take developmental courses at a two-year institution before transferring to a four-year college. Thus, retention is defined as continuous enrollment through the transfer to a four-year institution. For instance, Valez and Javalgi (1987) conducted a study to measure the likelihood of students transferring from a two-year to a four-year college. They found that living on campus and being socially involved in campus activities increases the probability of degree completion and transfer for community college students. Taken together, these findings indicate that community college student retention is an important and multifaceted issue in higher education.

**Minority Student Retention at Community Colleges**

The retention of specific community college student populations has garnered some attention in the research literature. For example, McKeon (1989) employed the Delphi technique to elicit
responses from 24 information-rich participants (Patton, 1990) about the efficacy of strategies for improving minority student retention at community colleges. Results suggest strong agreement on factors ranging from providing an educational environment conducive to learning to implementing academic and social support services.

A small handful of studies provide empirical evidence about the factors associated with African American male retention at two-year community colleges. For instance, Dorsey (1995) analyzed data to study retention of 858 African American males who enrolled at a community college in Maryland between 1987 and 1990. He found that choosing a degree program that offered immediate employment at graduation, financial status, and parent’s level of education are significantly related to persistence.

In a study based on a nationally representative sample of African American men in their first year of college, Flowers (2006) found that Black men at four-year institutions reported higher levels of academic and social integration than their counterparts at two-year institutions. In another study, Wellbrock (1997) sought to understand which of 19 community colleges in New Jersey had the most success in retaining African American males. Drawing on survey and interview data, he found that retention is a matter of high concern although no institutions offered targeted assistance to Black men.

In sum, these studies show that student retention in general, and Black male student retention in particular, is a result of many factors. A relatively scant literature exists that estimates the influence of various factors on the retention of African American males at two-year community colleges. This is the gap that the present study attempts to fill.

**METHOD**

This study represents a secondary analysis of data drawn from the 2004–2005 administration of the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CCSEQ) sponsored by the University of Memphis.

**Instrumentation**

The CCSEQ consists of 191 items designed to elicit information about the quality and quantity of students’ experiences in the community college environment. The CCSEQ was developed based on the notion that the more effort students expend in using institutional resources and opportunities, the more they benefit. The CCSEQ was based, in part, on the same philosophy as the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) developed by Pace (1984). Despite the author’s (Friedlander, Murrell, & MacDougall, 1993) support for the use of CCSEQ data, empirical research using CCSEQ data is limited. This adds to the currency of the present study.

**Sample**

The analytic sample was restricted to African American male respondents only ($N = 127$). Specifically, I included only those individuals who were currently enrolled in an associates of arts (AA) and/or associates of science (AS) degree program. In consonance with the theoretical
framework upon which this study is based, the sampling strategy controlled for differences in initial reasons for enrolling (e.g., non- vs. degree-seeking, etc.). Although this limited the sample to fewer than 200 individuals, (a) similar sample sizes have been used in CCSEQ-based studies (Eklund-Leen & Young, 1997); (b) the CCSEQ is administered by many predominantly White community colleges that enroll relatively few Black men (Friedlander, Pace, & Lehman, 1990); and (c) the sample is still large enough to yield meaningful results from significance tests (Stevens, 2002). In addition, confirmatory factor analysis results revealed that the psychometric properties of the original instrument were retained in the subsample (see alpha reliability coefficients in next section).

A large majority of the analytic sample spoke English as a native language (87%). Sixty-one percent took classes during the day only while 33% took “some day & evening” classes. Twenty-four percent of the sample consisted of 18–19 year old African American males. Table 1 presents complete details for each of these traits including their community college grades.

### Measures

The dependent variable used in this study reflected the degree of students’ satisfaction with their college experience. Satisfaction is generally defined as a psychological, subjective evaluation of one’s college experience (Bean, 1980). Drawing on the theoretical understandings that grounded this research, satisfaction with college is a strong predictor of intent to remain at an institution which is highly correlated with actual retention. I assessed students’ satisfaction using two items

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**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–19 years</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–22</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23–27</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28–39</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 and above</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English native language?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades at two-year college</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A−/B+</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B−/C+</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C/C− or lower</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No grades</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes meet?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day only</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening only</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some day &amp; evening</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Totals may not round to 100 due to rounding.*
designed to measure (a) whether a respondent would choose the same college if he had to do it over again and (b) the extent to which college is stimulating and exciting. Responses were summed to create a composite variable representing a participant’s overall satisfaction with his two-year college experience (alpha = .70). This procedure is consistent with suggestions offered by Pace (1984) and reliability coefficients reflect those reported by others (Lehman, 1991).

The independent variables for the present study were conceptualized according to the theoretical frameworks as well. As previously mentioned, the sampling strategy took into account that student retention (outcome) is influenced by background traits such as race, gender, and initial reasons for enrolling (inputs). Theory also guided my thinking about the factors or within-college experiences (environment) that might influence retention correlates. For instance, one set of independent factors measured participants’ social integration with students. For example, one item asked students to rate the frequency with which they “talked with students from different religions.” Responses were placed on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (very often). For this analysis, I operationalized three social integration scales: social integration with faculty members (two items, alpha = .69); social integration with students (six items, alpha = .92); and social integration with campus life (eight items, alpha = .90).

A single measure of academic integration was adopted following guidance offered in prior research. For instance, Nora and Cabrera (1996) found it useful to view academic integration as a function of grades. Thus, I used an item that measured participants’ grades ranging from 1 (mostly As) to 6 (Lower than C-). Precedence for using this item was set by prior studies (Sutton, 2006).

Finally, I employed a rigorous set of statistical controls beyond those implied by my sampling frame. Statistical controls included age (in years) and number of units taken during recent term (Astin, 1993). There were also measures that assessed the impact of one’s family commitments (Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996) and job responsibilities (Astin, 1993; Nora et al., 1996) on his schoolwork. Number of units taken ranged from 1 (less than 6) to 5 (more than 15). The impact of family and job commitments on one’s schoolwork was rated by two separate items placed on the same scale ranging from 1 (no job/family) to 4 (big impact/takes a lot of time). Statistical controls were introduced to isolate the net effect of academic and social integration on African American males’ satisfaction with their two-year community college experience. Net effect refers to the “effect after having controlled for the effect(s) of some [intervening] variables” (Vogt, 1999, p. 189).

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in three stages. First, descriptive statistics were used to calculate means and standard deviations for all independent and dependent variables included in the analysis. Second, correlation analyses were conducted to explore preliminary linkages amongst the variables. Third, hierarchical multiple regression tests were employed to measure the impact of selected variables on satisfaction with college among a sample of African American males at two-year community colleges. Hierarchical regression analysis is “a method of regression analysis in which independent variables are entered into the regression equation in a sequence specified by the researcher in advance. The hierarchy (order of the variables) is determined by the researcher’s theoretical understanding of the relations among the variables” (Vogt, 1999, p. 129). The next section presents results from the final analysis.
RESULTS

Correlation analyses revealed a number of statistically significant linkages among the dependent, independent, and control variables at both the $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$ levels. These exploratory findings justified the use of multivariate regression techniques to estimate the net effect of individual sets of variables. Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all independent and dependent variables included in this analysis.

Hierarchical multiple regression tests were conducted to estimate the net effect of academic and social integration variables on African American males’ satisfaction with their experiences.

### TABLE 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Main Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Units</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>-0.24*</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>-0.36*</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SI-peer</td>
<td>13.39</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.20*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI-life</td>
<td>11.01</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.31*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI-fac</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.36*</td>
<td>0.62*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satis</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>-0.40*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.33*</td>
<td>-0.27*</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* SI-peer = social integration with students. SI-life = social integration with campus life. SI-fac = social integration with faculty. Satis = satisfaction.

### TABLE 3
Predicting African American Males’ College Satisfaction From Academic and Social Integration, Controlling for Theoretically Based Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th>Step 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$B_0$</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Units</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI-students</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI-campus</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI-faculty</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. $R^2$</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Step 3 $F(8,102) = 4.75, p < .01.$
at two-year community colleges. Controlling for an array of potentially confounding variables (e.g., age, units taken, job’s impact on school, etc.), the linear combination of factors had a statistically significant impact on college satisfaction, $F(8, 102) = 4.75, p < .01$. The regression coefficient was .52 indicating that approximately 27% of the variance in Black male’s satisfaction with college could be explained by the variables in the final model. Perhaps surprisingly, background factors (e.g., age, external impacts, and credits taken) accounted for the greatest amount of variance explained ($\Delta R^2 = .19$). The addition of academic integration (model 2) accounted for an additional 3% of the variance in satisfaction. And, adding social integration measures to the model ($\Delta R^2 = .06$) expanded its explanatory power but reduced academic integration to nonsignificance. Table 3 presents a summary of the regression analysis.

Collinearity statistics revealed that multicollinearity was not a problem for this analysis. Multicollinearity exists when two or more independent variables are highly correlated which, in turn, complicates any efforts to isolate the net impact of a single variable on the dependent variable (Vogt, 1999).

DISCUSSION

This study measured the relationship between academic and social integration factors and African American males’ satisfaction with college, a strong correlate of college student retention (Bean, 1980, 1983). Using data from the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CCSEQ), I conducted hierarchical, multivariate analyses to investigate the following research question: What is the relationship between background traits, institutional characteristics, degree goals, academic outcomes, measures of social integration, and satisfaction with college for African American males? The results of this study suggest a number of important conclusions.

First, background factors accounted for the greatest amount of variance explained in satisfaction; this was consistent with prior studies on retention (e.g., Pascarella & Chapman, 1983). Specifically, age was related to African American male’s satisfaction at two-year community colleges. Findings indicate that older students were less satisfied than their younger counterparts. These results are consistent with findings reported by Dorsey (1995) and Soltz (1994). Given that community college students tend to be older, results from the present study may be far-reaching and provide clues about specific subpopulations that need additional assistance (e.g., older Black men). While additional research investigation is warranted, this finding may reflect the negative impact of detractors, or commitments that tend to increase with age such as family responsibilities, full-time work, children and other dependents, and even health conditions. Future research might explore this topic more closely and compare younger Black male community college students to their older counterparts.

Second, grades were only marginally related to satisfaction with college among African American men at two-year community colleges. For instance, in the second step of the analysis, grades were statistically related to satisfaction with college. However, the effect of grades was reduced to nonsignificance when social integration factors were added to the equation. Results suggest that the impact of academic integration does not persist in the face of social integration variables, but it is less clear just why this is the case. On the one hand, my findings are consistent with previous studies that call into question the salience of academic integration to community
college student retention (Braxton et al., 1997). Yet, results seem to contradict previous studies that underscore the importance of the academic realm in community college settings (Fox, 1986; Halpin, 1990). It may be the case that academic integration is less predictive of retention-related outcomes for Black men. To be sure, this finding merits replication as the weight of evidence is inconsistent.

Interestingly, the extent to which family responsibilities influenced one’s schoolwork predicted college satisfaction among Black men at two-year colleges. In fact, this was the only external commitment variable to enter the regression equation. Results reveal significantly higher levels of satisfaction for African American males whose family responsibilities have little to no affect on their school work. In addition to other factors like age, background traits and external commitments accounted for the greatest amount of variance in satisfaction with college among Black men. This sheds light on two conclusions: (a) first, what Black men bring to the community college door matters a great deal, and (b) without adequate support, challenges associated with such family commitments can compromise the success of students who might otherwise be retained. Community college administrators are encouraged to think creatively when fashioning policies and programs that offer an appropriate balance of challenge and support (Sanford, 1966) to Black men. For instance, I drew upon findings from this analysis to recommend the establishment of childcare centers, 24-hour study lounges, and Black male learning communities/cohorts at a recent meeting of community college educators.

Fourth, social integration with other students was related to satisfaction with college for Black men at two-year community colleges. In conjunction with other variables in the final model, social integration added to the prediction of student satisfaction accounting for almost one third of the variance overall. Perhaps surprisingly, however, the effect of social integration was negative, consistent with previous research on two-year students (Nora, Attinasi, & Matonak, 1990; Pascarella, 1980). It may be that frequent interactions with other students (whose age, race, and values differ from one’s own) lower Black males’ satisfaction at two-year colleges. Alternatively, this may reflect the fact that dissatisfied Black male collegians actively seek out opportunities to engage with other students at two-year colleges similar to what’s believed about high-achieving Black collegians at four-year colleges (Fries-Britt, 1998). Future work might substantiate and clarify the nature of this relationship.

The use of statistical controls in this analysis represents an improvement over previous studies that fail to control for differences that may impact the outcome variable. This study sought to isolate the true, net effect of academic and social integration on satisfaction for Black men at two-year colleges by adjusting the estimates of effects downward by accounting for potentially confounding influences (e.g., age, family responsibilities, etc.). Future work should continue to advance this line of inquiry and adopt additional controls where necessary.

Another contribution of this research to the extant body of knowledge relates to its theoretical and conceptual underpinnings. In this study, Tinto’s (1993) college student retention theory and Astin’s (1993) I-E-O model guided my selection of variables and the order in which they were entered into the regression equation. Taken together, results suggest the importance of employing multiple frames in educational research. Tinto’s model helped me understand retention as a longitudinal process that is generally characterized as a movement from background traits through academic and social integration to retention by way of satisfaction. However, Astin’s model provided language for talking about the specific factors (i.e., age, etc.) that relate to educational outcomes (e.g., satisfaction).
These findings are important for a number of constituent groups in higher education. One group that might benefit from the results of this study includes academic advisors at community colleges. Results from this analysis suggest that background traits, social integration, and external factors matter, at least in part, when it comes to African American males’ satisfaction. Advisors might consult these findings when considering ways in which they might assist such students.

Family members (e.g., spouses, siblings, etc.) might also benefit from the results of this study. Findings indicate a significant relationship between family factors and satisfaction with college. Black men who receive support from family for their educational goals are more likely to be satisfied and more likely to be retained. Student affairs professionals might pause and reflect on these results as well. Previous research has shown that student affairs professionals in non-traditional settings can act as surrogate family members and assist students as they navigate their way through college (Hirt, Strayhorn, Amelink, & Bennett, 2006).

The present study has implications for future research. Prior research has focused on African American males at four-year institutions; this study provided new evidence on Black men at two-year community colleges. Future research might adopt a comparative research design similar to Williamson and Creamer (1988), focusing on African American males at two-year versus four-year schools exclusively. Such studies would advance our knowledge about Black males and may lead to theoretical innovations.

This study was an initial investigation with a sample of Black men at two-year institutions. Future work should extend this study by operationalizing academic integration with multiple measures or culturally sensitive items (see Kraemer, 1997). This study shows that background traits are important when measuring student satisfaction. Yet, there may be other personological variables (Lounsbury, Gibson, & Hamrick, 2004) that circumscribe an individual’s opportunity for success in higher education. Future researchers might draw on psychological assessments, such as the Big Five personality traits, to test their ability to reduce the amount of explained variance with respect to African American males’ subjective assessment of college.

Finally, the present study employed two widely used theories. Other explanations exist that might illuminate factors that can be leveraged to increase the retention of African American males in two-year colleges. For instance, socialization or social exchange theories might prove fruitful in future research studies as they provide constructs for talking about the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for successful membership in an organization or other setting (Weidman, 1989). Future researchers might “try on” such “lenses” which may allow one to “see” student outcomes in new and different ways.

LIMITATIONS

As with all research investigations, this study is not without limitations. First, the sample size is relatively small given the fact that significant numbers of African American men begin their postsecondary education careers at two-year community colleges (Flowers, 2006). However, the Community College Experiences Questionnaire is administered at participating community colleges that tend to be predominantly White (there are only a few historically Black community colleges). The study’s findings should be interpreted in light of this consideration.

Second, this analysis relied upon self-reported data. To the extent that respondents did not know the information being requested or found the survey ambiguous, the validity of these findings may
be limited. Yet, scholars tend to lend support to the merit of self-reported data (Astin, 1993; Pace, 1984). In fact, Gonyea (2005) noted, “In reality, all questionnaire surveys . . . rely on some type of self-reported information” (p. 74).

Third, this study represents a secondary analysis of existing data. A major advantage of secondary analysis is the use of information-rich databases at little to no financial cost. However, secondary analyses are constrained by measurement choices made by previous researchers (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). For instance, how I measured student satisfaction with college was limited by the kind of indicator that could be constructed using information available in the database.

Although important, these limitations do not reduce this study’s ability to provide important information about the relationship between satisfaction with college and academic and social integration for African American males at two-year community colleges. Given the amount of attention directed towards Black men in college (Cuyjet, 2006), their dramatically low rates of college enrollment and subsequent degree attainment—and more recent data that suggest a dismal outlook for Black men at 2-year community colleges (Esters & Mosby, 2007)—this study was timely and may illuminate important nuances in the college student departure puzzle.

CONCLUSION

Retention of African American male college students is an ill-structured problem (Kitchener, 1986). That is, the complexity of the issues surrounding Black male retention in community colleges defies solutions of a singular nature. A multifaceted institutional response that brings together professionals from academic and student affairs represents the optimal condition for effective intervention. Findings from this analysis provide clues to multiple levers that can be manipulated to increase the satisfaction and subsequent retention of African American men in two-year community colleges. These results can be placed in the context of the existing literature describing a number of barriers to Black males’ success in college. Indeed, future efforts to remedy the problems faced by African American males throughout the educational pipeline must be comprehensive, intentional, and deliberate, if at all.

REFERENCES


FACTORS INFLUENCING RETENTION OF BLACK MEN 373


