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CAREER DECISION-MAKING PATTERNS OF UNDECIDED  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE TRANSFER STUDENTS:  
A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

by

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B.S. East Carolina University, 1997  
M.Ed. The University of Georgia, 2001

A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the Department of Educational and Human Sciences  
Higher Education & Policy Studies Program  
in the College of Education  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

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Major Professor: Rosa Cintrón

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## ABSTRACT

The career development and career decision-making needs of African-American males have generated much inquiry. Two year colleges currently serve as the predominant point of entry for many African-American male students seeking baccalaureate degrees. However, the transition to and eventual success at the four-year institution is often met with challenges. The inability to choose a major that may lead to a desired career has the potential to serve as a barrier for some students. From the lens of social cognitive career theory, this qualitative study was conducted to examine the experiences of undecided, African-American male transfer students at a large, four-year metropolitan university. Upon analyzing data from the interviews, themes were developed according to three research questions. Themes that offered insight into major selection process included: (a) choosing a major that offered potential job stability/security, (b) experiences related to academic ability, and (c) experiences with gender relative to career decision-making. Participation in the Direct Connect program was the minor theme found related to experiences encountered in the transfer process that influence major and/or career development. Themes related to the development of career decision-making self-efficacy included: (a) choosing careers believed to be consistent with one's person, (b) indecision while at the community college, (c) engagement in practical experiences, (d) solving problems, (e) meeting with advisors and counselors at the community college, and (e) involvement in extracurricular activities.

“It takes a village to raise a child” is a proverb that is synonymous with my upbringing. For as long as I can remember, my family has played and continues to play an integral role in my life. They offer encouragement and support and often have faith in me when I may fail to have faith in myself. My aunts Martha Latham, Barbara Strong, and Alice Brooks have been like second mothers. While my uncles Clarence Latham and Melvin Strong have been like second fathers. Uncle Clarence always called me “Little Professor” growing up. It appears he spoke my doctoral success into existence several decades ago. For this I am grateful.

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Love always, your son.

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Over the years, I have amassed an amazing and incomparable group of friends that have been with me through happy and not so happy times. Dr. Heather Scott and

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### Background

In their inception, institutions of higher education were reserved for the sons of society's elite who were predominately white Anglo-Saxon. Karabel (2005) posited that schooling in the United States was reserved for certain populations and was, at best, based on a system of differentiation. According to Brubacher and Rudy (1997), the goals of these restrictive institutions were to educate future clergymen, business leaders, and politicians. As the landscape of the nation began to develop, the need for an educated citizenry became imperative. In the words of Berg (2005), "Practical training through apprenticeship was of fundamental social and economic importance in the English colonies in America" (p. 33). This need for practical training made it possible for the "common" man to gain an education. As times have continued to change, so have the missions of many of the United States' cathedrals of learning. The number of students enrolling in institutions of higher education has also increased significantly. According to the Almanac of Higher Education (2011), approximately 18 million persons were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities. According to Keller (2008), institutions included a more diverse student population consisting of both women and people of color, an increase in the gerontological population, and higher numbers of low-income and middle-income students. Unlike the days of yesteryear, students have increasingly been allowed to engage in rigorous training in a plethora of occupational fields. It is important to note that many of the 21<sup>st</sup> century institutions of higher education have

begun to cater to more diverse student populations. The reputation of the American institutions has emerged as one of high academic quality. However, these reputations are based on comparisons with a small number of research and elite liberal arts colleges. Many of these elites may not be representative of most institutions as they include such factors as “faculty with strong research or scholarly orientations, selective admissions policies, and undergraduate student bodies that are largely residential, full-time, traditional age, non-working, non-minority, and of middle- or upper middle-class social origins” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998, p. 156). Pascarella and Terenzini noted that these institutions have set the standard for what most Americans believe constitutes higher education. The examination of undecided African-American transfer students in the proposed study will provide a perspective that may positively or negatively influence these students who hail from institutions that have open admissions policies, reward faculty for teaching and not engaging in research, and are composed of disproportionate numbers of non-resident, part-time, older, non-white, and working class students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998).

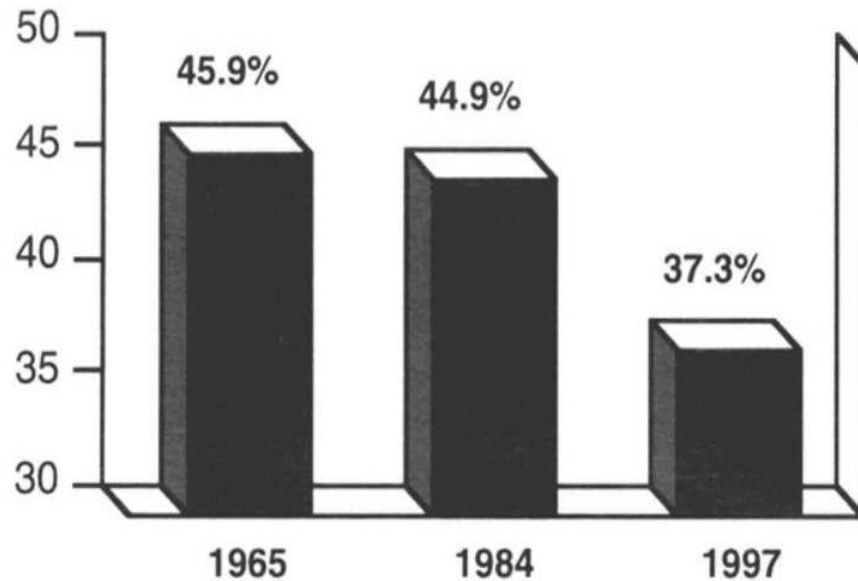
Zunker (2006) noted that people work for several reasons which are both financial and psychological. He noted that psychologically, many people derive their identity from work and find work as a source of personal accomplishment. Chickering and Reisser (1993) echoed this sentiment as they noted that for college students, developing a purpose in life, especially in the area of career development, was an important developmental task. Several reasons drive today’s students to pursue a higher education. According to a 1997 survey of American college freshmen, approximately three-fourths of all students

cited getting a better job (74.6%) and making more money (73%) as the most important reasons for attending college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). These students were, according to Alsop (2009), diverse, technologically savvy, multi-taskers, and often highly nurtured by their parents. In their quest to gain employment and financial stability, they have been faced with several career options and the daunting task of making a decision. According to a Census 2000 brief, there are a total of 509 occupational categories (Fronczek & Johnson, 2003). Along with the seemingly endless variety of career choices, students have also held high expectations of the benefits associated with these careers. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) noted that many administrators in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century viewed their students as “a generation with great and sometimes outlandish expectations” (Bridging, 2009, p. 1). These sometimes unrealistic expectations, along with the plethora of careers from which to choose, would lead one to ponder the anxiety students must encounter when making decisions about career choices. Gordon (2007), an expert on undecided students, explained “When students enter college, many of them feel overwhelmed with the great number of academic major and career options open to them” (Gordon, 2007, p. 9).

Like many other students, African-American male students have also found themselves pondering the potential outcome of their career choices. According to Brown, Minor, and Jepsen (1991), of the four racial groups investigated in their study, African Americans reported the greatest need for career planning and information. Pope-Davis and Hargrove (2001) wrote, “As the largest racial and ethnic minority group in the United States to date, African Americans continue to face a number of vocational problems



including disproportionately high rates of underemployment, unemployment, poverty, and educational deficits” (p. 177). As shown in Figure 1, African American men represent a minority within a minority.



*Figure 1. All African -American Enrollments: Percentage of Black Men*

*Note.* Adapted with permission from “The Alarming Decline in the Academic Performance of African-American Men,” by T. Cross and R. Slater, Spring, 2000, *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, p. 82. Copyright 2000 by *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*. Reprinted with permission from the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*.

In 1965, African American men represented 45.9% of African American students. Nearly 20 years later, this percentage declined to 44.9% in 1984 and eventually to 37.3% in 1997. This low enrollment percentage is particularly alarming in that the bachelor’s degree often “serves a screening or certification function so that those without a

bachelor's degree are effectively barred from entry into high-status, high income careers" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 448).

Although African-American males comprise only a small portion of the American population, they have tended to occupy the highest levels of unemployment in the country. According to a 2011 news release by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, approximately 18.4 % of African-American males in this country were unemployed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011), a number twice that of unemployed Caucasian males.

When employed, African American males tend to be overrepresented in blue-collar, service, fabricators, or laborer types of positions (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011; Hargrow & Hendricks, 2001). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011), the largest numbers of jobs available for African American men at the time of this study were as correctional officers, security guards, maintenance workers, cooks, motor vehicle operators, and mechanics. These positions are among the lowest paying on the occupational pay scale. Not only are these positions low paying, but they have also been identified as some of the largest sources of unemployment. At times these positions garner anywhere from an 11% to 13% unemployment rate (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Hargrow and Hendricks reported that these jobs have been considered traditional occupations for African American men because the percentage of African American males occupying these positions has been at or above the percentage level in the general population. In contrast, nontraditional occupations for African American males have tended to be those in which there has been an underrepresentation of African American

males (Hargrow & Hendricks, 2001). These nontraditional positions include those in areas such as management, business, and other professional occupations that often require a baccalaureate degree. Differing from service types of positions, these positions saw some of the lowest numbers of unemployment in 2010 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). As the bachelor's degree is often used as a "screening" tool with employers, and in essence a significant barrier to nontraditional occupations, it is mandatory that African American males obtain this diploma in order to have opportunities outside the traditional realm of occupational choices.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) observed that 73% of students stated that making more money was a significant factor in their reasons for attending college. African American male college students were included in this percentage of students with economic gain as a reason for attending college. This further substantiates the need for African American male students to obtain the bachelor's degree. Super (1957) observed that in the work-oriented society of the United States, occupations may be the most likely avenue of social mobility. He further posited that "Men and working or career women improve their social status primarily by improving their occupations, and other changes made in the way of life are embellishments of the occupation rather than independent of it" (Super, 1957, p. 27). He alluded to the value of gaining an education as he observed that education often provided the impetus for occupational mobility. However access to this mobility is only obtained through formal education. He also discussed the negative effects of not gaining a formal education, adding, "When obtaining the formal education is made difficult, this avenue of upward mobility is virtually closed" (Super, 1957, p. 28).

The engagement of this population in the career decision-making process is particularly important, as it may be a significant factor in the career and economic success of these students.

### Statement of the Problem

The enrollment of African American male students in institutions of higher education has been and continues to be extremely low. According to the Almanac Issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2011), only 4.5 % of the approximately 18 million students enrolled in U.S. colleges were African-American males. Cuyjet (1997) had earlier commented that their low college enrollment had many implications on the future status of African American males. One of the most profound areas to be affected by non receipt of higher education for this group is the dearth of career opportunities. The inability to obtain a bachelor's degree has had and will continue to have a detrimental impact on the career advancement of this population (Cuyjet, 1997; Majors & Billson, 1992; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

To add to the issues impacting African American male students, many begin their college pursuits at community colleges versus four-year institutions. Hagedorn, Hampton and Maxwell (2001) indicated that community colleges were the predominant point of entry for African American college students (p. 244). Unlike "typical" students at four-year institutions, many community college students face greater adversity, e.g., employment and/or family responsibilities, lower socio-economic status, and indecision regarding college major (Hagedorn et al., 2001). As each of these sources of adversity

can serve as major barriers to the completion of a degree, the inability to decide on a college major that is consistent with one's values, interests, personality and skills can also be detrimental. Interestingly, researchers have indicated that when African American students make major career decisions, they tend to be concentrated in certain areas and oriented toward low-prestigious occupations (Brown, 1995; Brown & Pinterits, 2001). Smith (1980) validated this claim in her research and concluded that African American students tend to major in social sciences and seek careers in social occupations.

Although these career choices are admirable, as these occupations traditionally seek to serve others in some way, they are typically less financially rewarding. There are several possible reasons for these choices. Miller, Springer, & Wells (1998) wrote that the perception of these occupations as being more prestigious and more accessible than other occupations may provide the rationale for these career choices. In addition to this perception, the debilitating effects of racism and sexism may also have influenced African American males toward socially oriented career aspirations.

To further complicate the career advancement pursuits of African American male students, Hagedorn et al. (2001) observed that retention rates of African American male college students were among the lowest of all ethnic groups in this country. Harper (2006) indicated that more than two-thirds of black men who started college did not graduate in six years. According to Harper, this was the lowest completion rate of all sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education and applied to students at both two-year and four-year institutions. Kojaku and Nunez (1998) sought to gain insight into the career goals of all first-time students enrolled in two-year colleges. The results of their

research revealed that 78% of students who participated in their study, which included a significant number of African-American males, planned on pursuing a baccalaureate degree. However, data from the study revealed that more than 70% of these students did not follow through in this regard. Along with these unfortunate percentages, the success of students that have actually transferred to four-year institutions also elicits concern. Although many of these students complete transfer requirements, many drop out at higher rates when compared to their native student peers (Hoyt & Winn, 2004).

For African American male students who are determined to overcome possible barriers to a successful transfer, many challenges continue to exist that could deter their efforts. Lack of rigorous academic preparation, unfamiliarity with academic expectations, and inaccurate transfer advising are all potential sources of distraction from successful transfer efforts (Laanan, Starobin, & Eggleston, 2010). One's potential choice of a major could also inhibit one's ability to transfer. According to Dougherty and Kienzl (2006), choosing an occupational major could serve as a barrier for a student enrolled in a two-year institution and wishing to transfer to a baccalaureate granting institution. The inability to decide on a major may not only inhibit successful matriculation at the community college but may hinder successful transfer and matriculation to the four-year institution. These potential failures could prove detrimental to the advancement and future economic security of African American male students.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore those experiences that serve as influences, as well as those that may serve as challenges in the career decision-making process of undecided African American male transfer students. This study was conducted to discover themes in the thought processes and experiences of this population regarding career decision-making. A goal of this research was to add to the limited knowledge of career development patterns of undecided African American male transfer students.

### Significance of Study

The career development and career decision-making needs of minority students have generated inquiry from a number of researchers (Cheatham, 1990; Lent & Brown, 1996; Leong, 1985; Luzzo, 1993). However, as Shipp (1999) noted, “There is a paucity of literature that has sought to provide information on the career choice process of minorities” (p. 344). Several researchers agreed with this sentiment, observing that the career development needs of America’s 30 million African Americans required urgent attention as a result of existing occupation and economic disparities (Bingham & Ward, 2001; Brown, 1995; Brown & Pinterits, 2001; Falconer & Hays, 2006). Results from a report developed by the National Career Development Association echoed this sentiment. In the report, it was concluded that of the four racial groups surveyed, African American respondents indicated the greatest need for career planning and information (Hendricks, 1994).

A significant portion of the career planning needs for this population may stem from the perceived and actual barriers that this population may face in regard to their career development. Leong (1985) suggested that assessment of these barriers may provide much needed insight into the career planning needs of minority persons. Many of the related practices were not developed with the career development needs of African-American persons, in particular African-American males, in mind. Kimbrough and Salomone (1993) concurred in their statement, “Current career counseling practices are not readily applicable to the needs and concerns of ethnic minority persons because they are based on the values and psychological orientations of the majority society” (p. 265). Although scholars have researched issues of career development as related to African Americans, (Berger & Melaney, 2003; Blake & Darling, 1994; Cheatham, 1990; Kimbrough & Salomone, 1993; Lent & Brown, 1996;), this study was imperative. The limited amount of research devoted to this topic has generated concern for the economic future of this minority population.

As to undecided students, Gordon (2007) stated that “The lack of research on racial and ethnic students who are undecided makes it difficult to understand who they are, their reasons for indecision, and specific ways to help them make educational and career decisions” (pp. 100-101). Information regarding transfer students has also been limited. Duggan and Pickering (2008) stated that the “mobility and complexity of the transfer student population often leave administrators and staff perplexed regarding how to identify a student’s needs, much less how to assist that student” (p. 454). They also suggested that although much research has been conducted regarding barriers to



academic success and persistence for traditional freshmen, “Little has been done to identify transfer students who may be at risk for academic difficulty and attrition” (p. 439).

Not only has the inability to complete baccalaureate degrees had significant impact on the status of African-American males in this country, this debilitating phenomenon has directly and negatively impacted the United States. The need for an educated workforce forced a growth in both two-year and four-year institutions in the U. S. (Berg, 2005). As the need for an educated citizenry is important, community colleges, along with four-year institutions will continue to play a significant role. At the time of this study, several states were experiencing rapid growth in the numbers of high school graduates. As a result, many of these states will have to rely heavily on their two-year post-secondary systems to accommodate these students (National Center for Public Policy, 2011). Researchers at the Center noted that

Failure to improve current rates of transfer and bachelor’s degree completion in these states will mean that many of these students will not reach their educational goals, and the states and the nation will risk a shortage of baccalaureate degree holders. (National Center for Public Policy, p. 2)

This investigation was conducted to gain information that would assist with the development and implementation of strategies to assist students as well as colleges and universities with their degree completion rates. As such, it was necessary to choose a theoretical framework that spoke to the career decision-making behavior of the African-American male population. The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) was used as the lens from which to view the career decision-making behavior of these students.

### Theoretical Framework: Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

As the needs of undecided African-American male transfer students are likely to be different than other populations, finding an applicable framework from which to understand their experiences and their perceptions of their experiences was imperative. In discussing her search for frameworks to help understand the experiences of undecided students, Gordon (2007) wrote that

The wide array of theoretical frameworks available from many disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology, business) offers a feast of ideas and concepts that can enhance our understanding of the characteristics of undecided students, as well as how their needs are different from many “decided” ones. (p. 55)

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) model is the lens from which the career decision-making behavior of this population was viewed. According to Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2000), the SCCT model was based on Bandura’s social cognitive theory and examined

several cognitive-person variables, (e.g., self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals), and on how these variables interact with other aspects of the person and his or her environment (e.g., gender, ethnicity, social supports, and barriers) to help shape the course of career development. (p. 36)

The model suggests that career development is influenced by objective and perceived environmental factors. Lent et al. (2000) described objective factors, such as quality of educational experiences or available financial support, as having the potential to affect one’s career development whether or not one ascertains their influence. Although individuals can be adversely or positively affected by these variables, the manner in which individuals make sense of their environment may provide the impetus for their career development (Lent et al., 2000). A focus on the perceived environment is

also a significant aspect of the SCCT model. Understanding this focus may be somewhat challenging, as individuals' responses to environmental conditions differ. Lent et al. (2000) provided an example of one individual achieving great career success despite adverse environmental conditions. In contrast, another individual who appears to have tremendous environmental advantages may still not achieve career success. This paradox speaks to the need to utilize a theoretical framework that considers multiple aspects of the objective environment such as economic conditions. Lent et al. (2000) reaffirmed this statement as follows: "The SCCT posits that when confronted by such pressures, an individual's choice behavior may be guided less by personal interests than by other environmental and person factors" (p. 38).

This model is relevant as it utilizes the social cognitive approach which allows for the alignment of one's work personalities with various occupations (Brown & Lent, 1996). According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy affects patterns of thought and partly determines one's actions and decisions to engage in a particular task, extend the effort, and persevere. He defined self-efficacy beliefs as expectations concerning one's ability to successfully perform a given behavior. Although Bandura has traditionally conceptualized self-efficacy as task specific, research has been found to support the concept of generalized self-efficacy. This concept is defined as "the tendency to feel capable of mastering a variety of diverse tasks and activities" (Lindley, 2005, p. 273). According to Betz (1992), there are four sources of self-efficacy beliefs: performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, verbal encouragement, and physiological arousal. Byars (2001) further detailed the relevance of self-efficacy by adding:

. . . what is important about people's experiences is not only the actual events themselves, but also the meaning that is attached to those experiences. Successful experiences strengthen self-efficacy beliefs, whereas failures tend to weaken them. Strong, realistic personal self-efficacy estimates also facilitate individuals' initiation of and persistence in performing a given task, which in turn, increases the likelihood of success. (p. 124)

Along with self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations are another component of the social cognitive theory. Outcome expectations can be defined as the personal beliefs about the consequences of a given course of action (Bandura, 1977; Lent et al., 2000). In addition, "Outcome expectations are shaped by direct and vicarious experiences as people learn about the consequences of directly engaging in some behavior or by observing others" (Byars, 2001, p. 124). These expectations also encompass different values, such as the expectation to make a certain amount of money and working with others, which are also influential in the career decision making process (Pope-Davis & Hargrove, 2001).

In its relation to career decision making, Lent et al. (1994) suggested that self-efficacy expectations influence choice, performance, and persistence in career-related areas. This reasoning led to the development of SCCT. Lent and Brown (1996) found that SCCT calls attention to the importance of the interaction between factors such as gender and race with their environments. According to Pope-Davis and Hargrove (2001), the model "attempts to describe how cultural learning experiences directly impact an individual's personal agency" (p. 179). They view that it is this personal agency which is reflective of both self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations that influence career interests and goals.

This particular model is relevant in its application to persons of color, in particular African American males. It encompasses two components that address cultural

dynamics, the first of which addresses early experiences that shape and influence career self-efficacy and outcomes expectations (Byars, 2001). According to Lent et al. (1994), an individual's background variables, which may consist of personal characteristics such as race and sex or contextual factors such as familial influences and SES influence, interact with the learning experiences to which one is exposed. The second component of the SCCT, according to Byars (2001), relates to the continual effects of external contextual factors such as labor market status, racism, sexism, and perceived barriers (p. 125). However, researchers on gender and self-efficacy (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Post, Stewart, & Smith, 1991) found contradictory results in regard to gender and its ability to predict career choice or self-efficacy beliefs.

Luzzo (1993) stated that most career development researchers tend to treat interpersonal and contextual as equivalent. The SCCT model differs in its approach.

Lent et al, (2000) offered the following explanation:

From the perspective of the SCCT, it is advantageous to distinguish conceptually between the person (e.g., low self-efficacy) and contextually (e.g., disapproval of significant others) factors that hamper career progress. Although person and contextual variables are seen as being in continual, reciprocal interplay over the course of an individual's career development (e.g., environmental conditions help to shape self-efficacy beliefs, which, in turn, affect one's response to environmental challenges), this does not mean that person and contextual variables represent a single, monolithic source of influence. (p. 39)

The researchers found that distinguishing between person and contextual factors had several theoretical and practical benefits that (a) help to clarify the processes through which contextual barriers become internalized, (b) offer novel counseling and developmental strategies for coping with or compensating for environmentally imposed barriers, (c) identify differing intervention targets and roles for counselors (Lent et al.,

2000). Furthermore, these researchers added that “In SCCT, barriers generally refers to negative contextual influences, with the understanding that contextual barriers are often functionally related to, yet conceptually distinct from, detrimental person factors” (Lent et al., 2000, p. 39).

In the SCCT model, it was also proposed that interests are developed by one’s self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Brown & Lent, 1996; Lent et al., 1994). When examining the career choices of African American males, it can be deduced that these students may experience difficulty when making a choice among majors and/or careers that require certain measures of success in subjects in which they may not have previously found success. These unsuccessful attempts are likely to lead to the development of flawed self-efficacy beliefs which may in turn hinder their occupational interests. Lent and Brown (1996) suggested that perceived performance accomplishments may be the most potent source of information for altering self-efficacy beliefs. In order to assist African American males in altering negative self-efficacy beliefs, these researchers suggested providing new performance experiences and reanalyzing past experiences. However, it is imperative to understand that the student must perceive these new performance experiences as successful in order to alter self-efficacy beliefs. Gainor and Lent (1998), in their research, supported these measures. They discussed the potential for African-Americans to develop interests in areas in which they have a sense of success and believe that their efforts will lead to positive outcomes.

Lindley (2005) examined the concept of SCCT and its relationship to career choice as well. In her research, she investigated barriers to career development and their

role in occupational choice. Although self-efficacy plays an integral role in the development of career choice, this construct alone may not be enough to predict career choice. Brown and Lent (1996) noted that even if one has high self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations for a particular career, one may still elect to avoid that career if barriers are perceived to be insurmountable. To further examine this phenomenon, Lindley utilized the six Holland themes as a framework for assessing perceived barriers on self-efficacy and outcome expectations. In her study, she revealed remarkable differences in male and female perceptions of perceived barriers and their influence on outcome expectations. In regard to men, Lindley found no relationship between outcome expectations and perceived barriers. However, her findings did suggest that a strong relationship exists for men in regards to the Holland theme, self-efficacy, and coping efficacy. It appears that the Holland themes of conventional and realistic self-efficacy were significant predictors of coping efficacy. This suggested that men with confidence for occupations consisting of these themes also have confidence in their ability to overcome career barriers (Lindley, 2005). This adds to the importance of examining self-efficacy in regard to career decision making among undecided African-American male transfer students. As Lindley suggested, if these students are able to identify careers that are aligned with their interests, they may be more confident in choosing majors that would assist with goal obtainment.

Although the SCCT model was utilized to frame the career decision making behavior of the population in this research, there have been some criticisms of its use. One of the first is the model's applicability to various cultures. In examining career

development theoretical models, cultural specificity refers to a theory's ability to integrate distinctive cultural constructs to account for vocational behaviors in particular racial and ethnic groups (Leong, 1995). According to Byars and McCubbin (2001), the cultural specificity of the SSCT model has yet to be established. This criticism may be viable, as the model considers socio-cognitive variables such as self-efficacy without examining the personal characteristics that impact career decision making behavior of minority persons. Byars and McCubbin (2001) echoed this criticism in their observation that "The worldviews, experiences, and unique cultural contexts of racial and ethnic minorities have been grossly omitted from the majority of vocational research" (p. 634). These possible omissions are important to recognize as this study was conducted to examine the experiences of a specific group of students as they related to career decision making. It was an assumption of this researcher that the experiences of this population would have significant impact on their career decision making behavior.

Along with the model's lack of focus on cultural specificity, the model has also been criticized for its shortcomings in examining outcome expectations. Lent et al. (1994) suggested that the model should expand to focus more on outcome expectations and individuals at different career stages. As this study was conducted to examine students who have begun their educational pursuits at two-year institutions and later transferred to four-year institutions, it was possible that the expectations of these students may have shifted in the transfer process. Because the missions of these two types of institutions vary, it was anticipated that the expectations of those attending could vary as well. However, as a significant number of students entering all types of institutions of



higher education plan on obtaining baccalaureate degrees, their expectations could also be more similar than different. It was the goal of the researcher to examine this phenomenon.

### Research Questions

1. How do African-American males construct the process of selecting a major appropriate to their career aspirations?
2. What experiences encountered by African-American males in the transfer process influence major/career development?
3. What experiences lead to the development of career decision making self-efficacy?

### Definitions

To lessen the chances of confusion, the following list of key terms that were utilized throughout this study is presented:

African-American: Any person that has origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. This includes people who indicate their race as “Black, African American, or Negro” (U.S. Census, 2011).

Blue-collar worker: Any worker that performs manual labor; could be skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled. It is important to note that only four decades ago, 79% of working African-Americans were employed as blue-collar workers (Komarovsky, 1987).

Career decision-making self- efficacy: An individual’s confidence in his or her ability to effectively complete career decision-making tasks (Taylor & Betz, 1983).

Career development: The total constellation of psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic, and chance factors that combine to influence the nature and significance of work in the total life span of any given individual (American Counseling Association).

Outcome expectations: The personal beliefs about the consequences of a given course of action (Bandura, 1977; Lent et al., 2000). Byars (2001) notes “outcome expectations are shaped by direct and vicarious experiences as people learn about the consequences of directly engaging in some behavior or by observing others” (p. 124). These expectations also encompass different values, such as the expectation to make a certain amount of money and working with others which are also influential in the career decision making process (Pope-Davis & Hargrove, 2001).

Self-efficacy: Expectations concerning one’s ability to successfully perform a given behavior (Bandura, 1977). Although Bandura traditionally conceptualizes self-efficacy as task specific, research has found evidence to support the concept of generalized self-efficacy. This concept is defined as “the tendency to feel capable of mastering a variety of diverse tasks and activities” (Lindley, 2005, p. 273). For purposes of this research, the concept of generalized self-efficacy was utilized. There are four sources of self-efficacy beliefs: performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, verbal encouragement, and physiological arousal (Betz, 1992).

Transfer Student: Any student that begins post-secondary education at a two-year institution and later transfers to a baccalaureate degree granting institution.

Undecided Student: Students who have not made a career decision but might not view their current status as a problem; they prefer to delay making a commitment. The prevalent developmental view is of an uninformed, immature person who generally lacks self-knowledge, information about occupations, or both (Zunker, 2006, p. 87). Although this is the prevailing perspective, it is estimated that up to 75% of college students enter college decided on a major but later change their minds (Gordon, 2007; Orndorff & Herr, 1996). For purposes of this study, undecided students encompassed those students who were labeled as undecided as well as those who may have had a declared status but were still unsure of their college major.

### Limitations

In this study, the researcher sought to examine those experiences of African-American male transfer students in a manner that would result in the accumulation of extensive information. However, there were some limitations which must be acknowledged:

1. The data for this study were generated largely from students who had attended two-year colleges in the state of Florida and had transferred to the University of Central Florida to complete baccalaureate degrees. Therefore, generalization of the results would be appropriate only for students found in similar situations.

2. The data collected from this study were subjective and open to the researcher's interpretation. It is possible that some readers may disagree with the interpretations generated from this study.
3. The researcher's personal experience as an undecided African-American transfer student could create unintended researcher bias.

#### Delimitations

1. Students included in the sample for the study were required to meet the following four criteria: (a) African-American male, (b) 18 years or older, (c) transfer student from a two-year institution, (d) undecided at some point about major/career choice. Socio-economic status, academic preparedness, and availability of financial resources were not considered as these variables were not controlled in this study.

#### Assumptions

1. It was assumed that the research questions developed for the study would provide overall direction and focus for the research.
2. It was assumed that the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) model was a viable lens through which to view the career decision-making behavior of the population.

3. It was assumed that the Interview Protocol, based on the SCCT which was developed for this study, supported by the researcher's experience, would be an appropriate tool in eliciting data to respond to the research questions.
4. It was assumed that participants in this study would be honest and forthcoming about their experiences as undecided African-American male transfer students.

#### Transparency of Researcher

As a student affairs practitioner for the past 13 years and a career counselor for the past seven, the holistic development, retention, and eventual success of college students are important issues that I continually address in my professional role. On several occasions, I have met with African-American male students who appear stressed and disillusioned in regard to making a career decision. Over the years, I have witnessed a number of these students leave the university or graduate with less than desirable grades. Often, their departure or poor academic behavior is due to academic failure in majors that are not consistent with their strengths and areas of interests. Regrettably, the decision to choose these incongruent majors has often been prompted by the promise of financial success and lucrative careers resulting from these majors. As a higher education practitioner, developing effective strategies to retain students and assisting students with matriculation are goals of my work.

As a former undecided, African-American male transfer student, I am familiar with many of the challenges this population encounters. I began my journey in higher

education at a two-year institution and was intent on pursuing a major in a health-related field due to various experiences in high school. However, after transferring to a four-year institution and with the passage of time, I found myself uninterested in my career pursuits and anxious about where to turn for help. Thus, my interest in this topic is both professional and personal. As an African-American male, it is disheartening to see the decreasing numbers of fellow African-American males receiving baccalaureate degrees. The current unemployment rate for African-Americans is significantly higher than it has been for a number of years. As the economy continues to suffer, this number may continue to rise. Although having completed a baccalaureate degree does not guarantee employment or economic success, one's chances of economic stability are significantly increased by obtaining the degree. Many of my friends have received baccalaureate and advanced degrees, but others have not. I have witnessed their challenges and continue to do so.

As a researcher, it is my responsibility to conduct scientific research in a manner that is ethical with hopes of enhancing the human condition. Kvale (1996) posited that "Ethical aspects of the researcher's role concern scientific responsibility, relation to the subjects, and researcher independence" (p. 118). My experiences, both professional and personal, have allowed me to witness firsthand the economic challenges encountered by African Americans. I have encountered feelings of angst and indecision in regard to my career choice, and I empathize with other African-American males who may endure similar experiences. It was my hope that these experiences, as well as my education, would allow me to relate to and build rapport with the subjects of this study. Ideally, the

results of this study will provide insight into the needs of this specific population as well as a foundation for the development of effective retention and matriculation initiatives. It was also a goal of mine to contribute to the sparse literature on the career decision-making behavior of African-American male transfer students.

### Summary

As society's need for an educated workforce has grown over the years, so has the desire of many individuals to obtain a higher education. At the time of this study, approximately 18 million persons were attending institutions of higher education in the United States (*Chronicle*, 2011). Many reasons exist for this ever increasing number of students. However, the opportunity for economic and financial advancement stands as one of the driving forces for students seeking to obtain higher education (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The number of occupational choices has also grown significantly. Due to an overwhelming number of occupational choices, along with several other factors, many students face difficulty when deciding on career choices and may remain undecided for some time (Gordon, 2007).

In 2011, African-American males comprised a very small percentage of the American college student population (*Chronicle*, 2011). Opportunities for career and economic advancement of these students were wrought with significant challenges including: (a) negative effects of racism and sexism, (b) a frequent lack of rigor in academic preparation, (c) inability to choose a major, and (d) the inability to successfully transfer from a two-year degree granting institution to a baccalaureate degree granting

institution. It is apparent that the career development needs of these students require urgent attention (Bingham & Ward, 2001; Brown, 1995; Brown & Pinterits, 2001; Falconer & Hays, 2006).

### Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 has provided a brief introduction to the study. Information contained in this chapter included background information on the current status of African-American males, research questions, significance of the study, Social Cognitive Career Theory as a theoretical framework, limitations and assumptions, definitions of key terms, and information regarding the transparency of the researcher. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature related to the current status of African-American males including issues related to discrimination, retention at community colleges, and the career decision making process affecting this population. Also considered are the nature of transfer students, the role community colleges play in the transfer process, and theories relevant to the career development of African-American male students. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research design and rationale, the research questions, site location, participant selection and recruitment, the pilot study, data analysis, principles of naturalistic paradigm and phenomenology, the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, IRB authorization, originality score, and a summary. A detailed summary of the participant overviews is contained in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the major and minor themes according to the research questions and an interpretation of the findings based on Social Cognitive Career Theory. Chapter 6 presents



recommendations for students, practitioners and administrators, as well as implications for future research.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The status of the African-American male college-age student in 2011 was dismal at best. Of the approximately 18 million students enrolled in institutions of higher education, only 4.5% were African-American males. These students were entering colleges and universities with a goal of obtaining a baccalaureate degree and becoming financially secure.

For a myriad of reasons, many African-American male students begin their pursuit of higher education at two-year colleges. Fleming (1984) observed that “Where black students go to college will continue to be a matter of individual choice, dictated by family, finance, geography, educational readiness, and personal preferences” (p. 157). Although two-year colleges have been very effective in enrolling and assisting these students in reaching their goals, many African-American males fail to matriculate. For those who fail to matriculate and/or transfer to four-year degree granting institutions, one barrier of substantial importance is the inability to choose a major that will lead to a desired career choice.

Topics explored in this review include: the current status of African-American males in society and as students at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and community colleges, issues of retention, and related issues of discrimination. Literature and research related to the nature of undecided students and the career decision-making process are reviewed along with the nature of transfer students and the

role of community colleges in the transfer process. Additionally, literature supporting theories relevant to the career development of African-American male students are reviewed.

### The Status of African-American Males in the U.S.

The ability to obtain a college degree has become more important as persons have associated the degree with increased chances of finding a job and earning more money (Duggan & Pickering, 2008). Many of 21<sup>st</sup> century college students are persons who in an earlier time period would not have considered attending college, and are now doing so with more than the usual obligations of typical college students. A number of African-American males are represented in this population. Different from their majority peers, however, African-American males in the United States are often plagued with hardships related to their economic plight, disappointments, and failures in their pursuit of higher education. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 24.9 % of all African Americans live below the poverty level, and 16.2% of African-American males are unemployed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Of those African American men who are employed, many tend to be overrepresented in the service operations, fabricators, or laborer types of positions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Hargrow & Hendricks, 2001). Mosidi and Murry (1993) added that “these primarily blue-collar occupations include domestic and personal service jobs, which serve mainly as a means of making a living rather than as careers” (p. 441).

Consistent with the status of African American male employment, the status of the African American male student is equally dismal. Garibaldi (2007) posited that on most local and national measures of academic achievement, African American boys were underachieving by significant margins. In his study of African American male youth, he found that:

These young men usually had the highest rates of suspensions, expulsions, non-promotions, dropouts, special education placements, and the lowest rates of secondary school graduation and gifted and talented assignments in the majority of the more than 16, 000 school districts across the country. (Garibaldi, 2007, p. 324)

Although black males may appear to have low educational aspirations, Garibaldi (2007) found that 95% of males indicated that they expected to graduate from high school. Ironically, 40% responded that they believed teachers did not set enough goals for them, and 60% suggested that their teachers should push them harder (Garibaldi, 2007). Harper (2006) found that across all degree levels, white men earned more than 10 times the number of degrees awarded to their black male peers. Polite and Davis (1999) echoed this conclusion in their finding that African American men lagged behind their white counterparts with respect to college participation, retention, and degree completion rates. The inability of this population to complete basic levels of schooling has directly impacted their literacy and employment ability (Majors & Billson, 1992).

The low percentage (4.5%) of black non-Hispanic males enrolled in college has several implications, particularly in employment opportunities and earning capabilities, for the status of African American males (Cuyjet, 1997). Cuyjet offered explanations for this low percentage. He stated,

The impact of such other negative factors as poorer primary and secondary educational opportunities and severe financial hardships can cause many black men to fail to gain access to college or, if admitted, to be underprepared for higher education's academic rigor. (p. 1)

Researchers Blake and Darling (1994) also argued that African American men are disinclined to invest in education because they are less likely to yield a favorable return on their investment compared to white men. Adoption of what is termed the "failure syndrome" further illustrates reasons why this population may fail to seek the baccalaureate degree. This syndrome, as described by Cuyjet, is the time when black males become aware that schools do not invest in their learning process. He added that, "Many of these young men internalize these attitudes and develop an inferior perception of their own abilities and aspirations as compared to others" (p. 8). Although a small percentage of African American males have "beat the odds" and made it to college, successful matriculation and the ability to declare a major that leads to a desired career choice may present additional challenges.

#### African American Males and Discrimination

Diversity has increased considerably on college campuses. Keller (2008) noted that college student populations include more students of color, women, an increased elderly population, and an increased number of low and middle income students. Several laws such as the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 created opportunities for many students to attend institutions that were traditionally not accepting of them. Though student populations have grown in diversity, the campus environment has not always been welcoming to minorities.

As mentioned throughout the literature, African-American males have experienced instances of racism and discrimination that have the potential of impeding their educational pursuits. Sadly, many of these unfortunate experiences begin in elementary and secondary schools and continue during college. Researchers have indicated that many black students attending predominately white institutions (PWIs) often experience feelings of isolation, alienation, and lack of support (Allen, 1992; Bourassa, 1991; Fleming, 1984). In evaluating campus life on a predominately white campus, Bourassa observed that “Many students of color find that policies and activities are designed for White students, and they find that the same holds true in the academic environment” (p. 15). In her research, Fleming offered similar but more intimate findings. She posited,

The problem for black males in white settings is very much an interpersonal issue that re-arouses the usually unnoticed strains of being male. The hostile reception given to them on white campuses acts to trigger interpersonal vulnerabilities and initiates a depressive withdrawal from the situation. (Fleming, 1984, p. 143)

Along with these feelings of isolation, many students of color have also expressed feelings of mistrust and uncertainty based on previous negative experiences. Similarly, many white students also experience feelings of uncertainty and discomfort as they may be encountering African-American students for the first time. According to Allen (1992), students consistently indicate their immediate social context and interpersonal relationships as the most important influences of academic achievement and social involvement. As such, it is imperative that institutions develop strategies and policies to encourage positive racial interactions.

Along with creating environments of angst and discomfort, instances of racism and discrimination, as well as students' perceptions of racism and discrimination, also serve as potential barriers to career development of these students (Cuyjet, 1997, 2006; Luzzo, 1993). Blake and Darling (1994) acknowledged that whites often perceive African Americans as threatening to their power and safety. Due to this perception, they may engage in discriminatory hiring practices. In the following statement, researchers Parham and McDavis (1987) recognized the discriminatory paths that African-American males must navigate in order to find career success: "African American men must realize their success in the world of work is often tied to their ability to assimilate their values, behaviors, appearance, and life styles into what the White culture deems legitimate" (p. 26). If African-American male students are not encouraged and perceive certain industries to be non-receptive, they may hesitate to choose majors that lead to careers in those fields.

As the literature has demonstrated, the career paths of African-American male students can be thwarted by several barriers including their institution of choice. According to Thomas (1984), African-American male students attending PWIs were more likely to choose traditional careers in the social sciences versus careers in non-traditional industries such as the biological, technical, and natural sciences fields. In contrast, African-American males attending historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) with high career goals aspired to more prestigious positions as physicians, judges, or corporate executives. These findings speak to the need for institutions to create environments in which all students can develop and succeed.

## African-American Males Attending Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs)

Although subjects in this study hail from two-year and four-year degree granting institutions, there are other institutions that have had a tremendous impact on the career development of African-American male students and deserve mention. Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have played a significant role in the matriculation and graduation of African-American male students. According to Fleming (1984), many of these institutions were created in response to federal legislation that required states to provide separate educational facilities for blacks or to admit them to existing ones. In acknowledging the inequitable nature in which these institutions were created, Fleming noted that “The majority of black public colleges, then, evolved out of state desires to avoid admitting blacks to existing white institutions, and the facilities provided were accordingly inferior” (Fleming, 1984, p. 5).

Similar to students who begin their academic experience at two-year institutions and later transfer to four-year institutions, many students attending HBCUs hail from families with lower socioeconomic status and may be less academically prepared than their peers at other institutions (Allen, 1992). Allen noted the “special mission” of the HBCU, stating that “These institutions pride themselves in their ability to take financially disadvantaged, academically underprepared Black students and correct their academic deficiencies” (p. 28). According to Provasnik, Shafer, and Snyder (2004), HBCUs enrolled approximately 16% of African-American students seeking baccalaureate degrees in 2004. This is a significant number, as these institutions account for only 3% of all U.S. institutions of higher education. Although the number of HBCUs is low compared

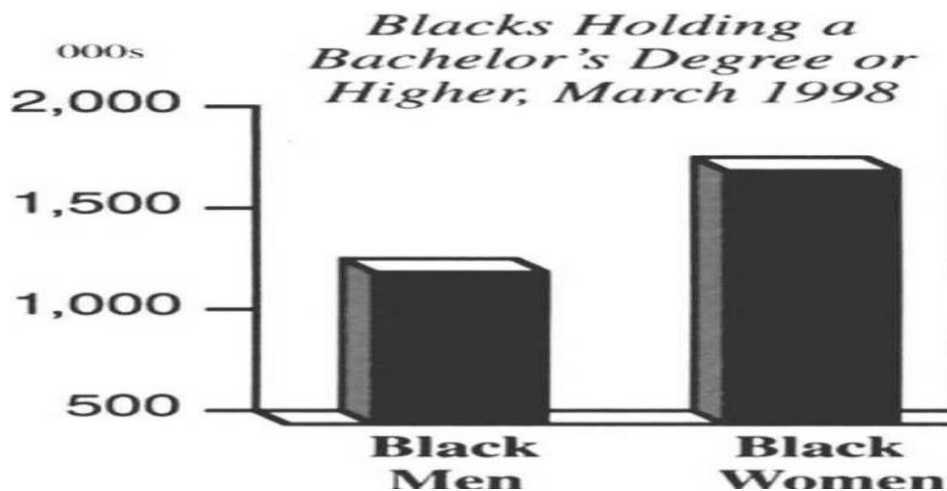


to the number of PWIs, about 30% of African-Americans earning a baccalaureate degree graduate from these institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996).

African-American students attending HBCUs also report being more satisfied and engaged with the campus community than African-American students attending PWIs. Much of this satisfaction may be due to the more collegial and supportive atmospheres found at HBCUs (Kim & Conrad, 2006; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Allen (1992) found that African-American students attending HBCUs have more frequent and meaningful interactions with their faculty members than their African-American peers at other institutions. This bodes well for HBCU students, as frequency of contact with faculty members has been found to promote academic growth and success among students (Kim & Conrad; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) wrote about the significant impact that positive student/faculty relationships have on the academic achievement, matriculation and eventual retention of students. Consistent with Allen's findings, Kim and Conrad revealed that more African-American students at HBCUs assisted faculty with research than did African-American students at PWIs. However, they also found no significant difference in degree obtainment or GPAs among African-American students attending HBCUs or PWIs. It is important to note that research on degree completion of African-American students at HBCUs, African-American males in particular, has been limited and the findings have been contradictory (Kim & Conrad, 2006; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

In 2006, Kimbrough and Harper wrote that African-American females outnumbered African-American men on all college campuses including HBCUs by a

ratio of two to one or more. Figure 2 illustrates the number of African-American men with a bachelor's degree versus the number of African-American women with a bachelor's degree.



*Figure 2.* Blacks Holding a Bachelor's Degree or Higher

*Note.* Adapted with permission from "The Alarming Decline in the Academic Performance of African-American Men," by T. Cross and R. Slater, Spring, 2000, 1998, *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, p. 84. Copyright 2000 by *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*.

Although the number of African-American male students studying at HBCUs has been relatively small, enrolled male students have found the benefits to be significant. Palmer and Gasman (2008) researched the experiences of African-American men enrolled in a public, urban HBCU. Findings from their study revealed that these students found the environment at HBCUs to be supportive and nurturing. The students also

shared that the supportive relationships with faculty, staff, administrators, along with strong peer relationships, encouraged their persistence at the institution.

Though HBCUs have been traditionally recognized as premier institutions for graduating African American male students, this may no longer be the case. Kimbrough and Harper (2006) reported that men earned only one-third (32.9%) of degrees at HBCUs in 2002 and African-American men earning graduate degrees from these institutions was even lower at 26%. Several reasons were given for this decline. According to Kimbrough and Harper, the recent decline in state supported institutions offering remedial programs was negatively impacting male enrollment at some HBCUs. This recent trend has the potential to severely limit the number of African-American males entering four-year institutions upon graduation from high school, as a significant number may need some form of remedial education. Garibaldi (2007) suggested that this need for remedial education may be due to the increasing number of African American male youth who have been placed into special education programs, retained, suspended or expelled from high school, and who have been consistently overlooked and undervalued by their teachers. Students who find themselves in these circumstances and have a need for remedial courses may encounter difficulty in gaining admittance to many four-year degree granting institutions. Beginning their education at two-year institutions may be one of the few options for post-secondary education for these students.

## African-American Males Attending Community Colleges

Like HBCUs, community colleges have played a significant role in the education of African-American male students. According to a number of researchers, these institutions are the predominant, if not sole, entry point for many African-American students (Hagedorn et al., 2001; Laanan et al., 2010; Pope, 2006). Students attend these institutions for a plethora of reasons including: low cost, flexible schedules, open access policy, convenient location, and smaller class sizes. However, researchers have also reported that these students often encounter numerous challenges as compared to the “typical” student at baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. These challenges include: lower socio-economic status, employment and/or family responsibilities, and failing to identify college majors (Hagedorn et al., 2001).

African-American males have found community colleges more accommodating as far as enrollment and affordability than four-year institutions. Thus, one would expect that African-American male enrollment in these institutions would increase. However, the number of African-American male students earning associate’s degrees and transferring to four-year institutions has remained low (Pope, 2006). Several criticisms have been put forth to explain this phenomenon. The recent focus of community colleges to provide more remedial courses to its academically disadvantaged population without providing the appropriate student services or productive environments is one such criticism (Pope, 2006).

Along with community colleges’ emphasis on providing remedial education, the “cooling out” phenomenon is yet another issue that can negatively impact the transfer

process of African-American males. According to Clark (1994), there has been a perception that African-American males and other minority students are being tracked and sorted. As such, it is the belief that these students are encouraged to pursue vocational and remedial tracks rather than participating in transfer programs and later pursuing baccalaureate degrees. If this is accurate, the effect on the social mobility and economic development of many African-American male students may be limited, as these tracks provide less financial stability than is available for baccalaureate degree recipients.

In his examination of African-American male enrollment and graduation from community colleges, Pope (2006) found some troubling information. In a comparison of data from 1976 to 1996, he found that the number of African-American males enrolled in community colleges had increased by 18.7 %. Although any increase can be perceived as positive, he also noticed an unfortunate trend. These students had enrolled as part-time students versus full-time students. According to Pope (2006), it is the perspective of many higher education researchers that students enrolled part-time are less prone to achieve academic success when compared to students enrolled full-time. Pope also examined completion rates during these periods. He found that African-American female and male students had associate's degree completion rates that increased by 120% and 36.7% respectively. Though any increase can be seen as positive, the associate's degree is imperative to advancing to a baccalaureate degree and the low completion rate for many African-American males is troubling.

## African-American Male Students and Issues of Retention

The ability of African-American males to obtain a baccalaureate degree is beneficial not only for this population but for society as a whole. However, reported throughout the literature are the dire circumstances related to African-American male students. Although the total number of students attending college has increased significantly over the years, the number of African-American male students has declined. To add to this unfortunate statistic, the retention rate of African-American male students is often the lowest among both sexes and all racial and ethnic groups enrolled in institutions of higher education.

Information gathered from Mortenson (2002) indicated that in 2000, 66.2% of African-American men discontinued their education before completing baccalaureate degrees. As indicated in the literature, there are several reasons for this declining retention rate. These reasons include but are not limited to: (a) lack of financial resources, (b) being academically underprepared, (c) inability to integrate both academically and socially, (d) lack of sufficient role models and connections to supportive faculty and staff, (e) exposure to climates of prejudice and discrimination, and (f) the inability to identify a major (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Cujyet, 1997, 2006; Hagedorn et al., 2001). Additionally, African-American male students that attend community colleges and transfer to four-year institutions not only encounter many of the above mentioned challenges but may experience other challenges as well. These include: lack of transfer student capital and transfer shock (Berger & Melaney, 2003; Duggan & Pickering, 2008; Laanan et al., 2010).

Obtaining a baccalaureate degree creates increased economic and social opportunities for African-American males. As such, attention to the career development and matriculation of this population at the community college and later at the baccalaureate degree granting institution is essential. Agreeing with this perspective, Pope (2006) expressed his agreement with this perspective:

The community colleges are the matriculation venue for large numbers of African American male students, helping them to stay in school and to obtain associate's degrees must be a priority for those who wish to see more African American men receive postsecondary education. (p. 226)

Pope (2006) also recommended several strategies that institutions could employ to improve the retention of African-American male students. He suggested that institutions should enhance the counseling services provided to African-American males and that these enhanced services should include job counseling for undecided students. In stressing the importance of this strategy, he advocated that "Job counseling services will particularly benefit African American males who are unsure of their future career goals and are blindly taking courses" (Pope, 2006, p. 227).

Along with enhancing counseling services, Pope (2006) also encouraged institutions to make more effort to assist these students in integrating more fully into their campus environments. According to Pope, this task suggests that all university personnel work together to provide a stronger sense of community for all students. Faculty serving in the role of mentors to this population of students is particularly imperative. Researchers have demonstrated that students that engage in research with faculty members outside of the classroom are more inclined to be retained and achieve academic

success (Kim & Conrad, 2006; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Palmer & Young, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Pope (2006) also cited other strategies that institutions could implement to assist with student retention including creating ethnic, cultural, and social support groups in which these students can meet and develop relationships with peers of similar and diverse backgrounds outside of the classroom. Similarly, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1996) discussed student development as occurring through multiple and diverse experiences including, but not limited to, students' out-of-class experiences in residence halls, involvement in fraternities, intercollegiate activities, and employment.

Peer interactions in these setting can have particular influence on student development and retention. After researching various scenarios of student involvement, these researchers reported that "The evidence is generally clear, however, that when peer interactions involve educational or intellectual activities or topics, the effects are almost always beneficial to students" (Terenzini et al., 1996, p. 461). In his study on peer support for African-American college males, Harper (2006) found that peers played a significant role in the success of high-achieving students. Harper stated that "When asked to whom they would attribute their college achievements, the high-achievers consistently replied: (1) God, (2) themselves, (3) their parents, and (4) their peers--almost always in that order" (p. 347). This statement supports the earlier work of Terenzini et al. and their conclusion that "The most powerful source of influence on student learning appears to be students' interpersonal interactions, whether with peers or faculty" (pp. 463-464). Because the findings of numerous researchers speak to the importance of



developing positive peer relationships, it is imperative that two-year and four-year institutions alike strive to create atmospheres and opportunities where these types of relationships can develop. Regardless of these positive peer relationships, however, students still may find themselves undecided as to their choice of career.

### The Nature of Undecided Students

For many college students, choosing a major can be a dreaded task; one that is often avoided as long as possible. According to Hannah and Robinson (1990), nearly 50% of freshman desired assistance with making career decisions. In a study conducted by Weissberg, Berentsen, Cote, Carvey, and Health (1982), similar results were found in that 50% to 80% of students surveyed indicated some need for assistance with career issues. Although the process of choosing a major may provoke some anxiety, it is a process that must be addressed. Researchers Pearson and Dellman-Jenkins (1997) viewed the ability to select a stable and realistic major as one of the most important factors in the satisfaction, success, and retention of many college students.

It appears that undecided students may share several traits and/or experiences that lead to career indecision. Goodstein (1965) posited that there were two types of undecided students: undecided and indecisive. A student may be undecided due to a variety of reasons such as vocational immaturity and societal or educational pressure to make a decision. According to Goodstein, the anxiety that this type of student encounters can be alleviated with a variety of experiences and information.

The second type of undecided student is known as the indecisive student (Goodstein, 1965). This type of undecided student experiences anxiety when making any type of decision and finds the process of making a commitment anxiety provoking (Germeijs & De Boeck, 2003; Goodstein, 1965). Osipow (1999) remarked that indecisiveness is a personal trait and is not an ordinary part of human development. In order to resolve issues leading to career indecisiveness and in essence major indecision, it is suggested that the indecisive student get assistance in dealing with the underlying factors contributing the anxiety (Goodstein, 1965; Gordon, 2007; Osipow, 1999).

Along with these two types of undecided students, another type of undecided student has become increasingly prevalent on college campuses. These students are known as the major changers. It is estimated that up to 75% of college students enter college decided on a major, but later change their minds (Gordon, 2007; Orndorff & Herr, 1996). As this is a significant portion of the college population, the plight of these students deserves attention. Gordon expressed the belief that many students discover that their previous ideas about academic majors and career fields change after they matriculate. She further added that this behavior is acceptable, and for some students is often logical, as many are dealing with issues of identity crisis. According to Gordon., “Many college students are in the midst of maturational and identity struggles; choosing an academic major from a myriad of choices is a developmental task for which they are not prepared” (p. 87). Although this group is comprised of a substantial portion of the college student population, it is a group that may also go unnoticed or tend to be neglected.

Much of the difficulty students face in choosing a major may lie in their inability to choose a career; in essence making it more difficult to choose a major that will lead to a desired career. Gordon (2007) suggested that many students are “trying to make direct connections between their college major and the “jobs” they will be prepared to enter after college” (p. 9). As the economy is constantly shifting, making these connections may become even more difficult. This particular concept may be perplexing as many students may have limited ideas of the thousands of existing occupational choices. According to researchers Orndorff and Herr (1996), “Most college students have not been exposed to a range and a variety of career options before choosing an academic major or a career direction” (p. 633). Although these students are contemplating their career choices, many will be declared as undecided.

Researchers have found that although some students have declared a major, many still express career uncertainty (Gianakos, 1999; Orndorff & Herr, 1996). Much of the research on undecided students suggests that although all students need assistance with career decision-making, a perplexing dichotomy seems to exist on most college campuses in relation to undecided and decided students (Gianakos, 1999; Orndorff & Herr, 1996). It has been found that though several programs exist on many campuses to assist the undecided student, not much is done for those who are decided. In addition to a lack of targeted programming, the decided students are often dissuaded from participating in existing programs (Orndorff & Herr, 1996). These practices can be damaging as it is clear that all students may need career assistance at some point. This need is evident in the number of declared students that change majors (Gordon, 2007; Orndorff & Herr,

1996). Pearson and Dellman-Jenkins (1997) advanced the premise that because many students succumb to parental and societal pressure, it is inevitable that many will change their majors as their ideas and experiences broaden.

Research on undeclared, as well as declared students, has yielded interesting, yet conflicting results. Orndorff and Herr (1996) examined the differences and similarities in career uncertainty between undeclared and declared students. Of the differences found in the study, declared students seem to possess higher levels of major and career decidedness and lower levels of career uncertainty than undeclared students (Orndorff & Herr, 1996). This heightened sense of career decidedness may have stemmed from the declared students' participation in a greater depth of exploration than the undeclared students. According to the researchers, "The declared students who were interviewed reported a diversity of career and self-exploration activities that assisted in the development of their interests in majors and careers" (Orndorff & Herr, 1996, p. 74). On the other hand, undeclared students primarily developed their interest through participation in academic courses. Orndorff and Herr also found that undeclared students tended to be more family-oriented than declared students. This revelation was especially interesting in relation to the African-American male student who may already possess an Africentric perspective (Cheatham, 1990). The possession of an Africentric perspective, which focuses on the survival of the community, along with the tendency to be family-oriented, may enhance the likelihood that African-American male students will be undecided or undeclared in their career choice. This information was important because

researchers have also indicated that undecided students are less likely to persist than their declared peers (St. John, Hu, Simmons, Carter, & Weber, 2004).

### Undecided African-American Male Students

Like many, African-American male students also encounter difficulty when making decisions regarding their choices of majors. In assessing the difficulty students' face when choosing a college major, Gordon (2007) suggested that students' inability to make direct connections between their major choice and their occupational choice was of significant concern for many students. A review of the literature indicated that this was only one of the barriers likely encountered by African-American male students.

The debilitating effects of racism and discrimination are two concepts that have undermined many facets of the African-American male experience. Unfortunately, the process of making a career decision is not exempt from these negative constructs. In her research on undecided students, Gordon (2007) found that "Black students may aspire to idealistic occupations, but may encounter the harsh reality of racism and racial discrimination when entering the world of work" (p. 99). Because of this harsh reality, the process of career decision making can be complicated for African-American male students. In her study of anxiety and locus of control as factors related to the career indecision of African-American students, Woodbury (1997) also found racism to be an undermining factor in the career choices of this population. Of the subjects studied, 76% identified racism as one of the detractors between their ideal and seemingly realistic

choice of careers. As such, these students may find themselves uncertain of their occupational paths and undecided in the selection of majors.

In the review of the literature, research focused on undecided African-American male students was minimal at best. In his 1983 research, Osipow reported that much of the research on undecided students focused on white college students. It was also apparent that when African-Americans were included in studies of career indecision, it was in comparison to their white peers. In the nearly 30-year period since Osipow's research, not much has changed. In her research on career indecision among African-American college students, Woodbury reached a similar conclusion in 1997. She stated that "Research on career indecision has focused primarily on predominately white college student groups" (p. 14). Regardless, however, Woodbury's research yielded some interesting findings related to African-American male students. She found that powerful others' locus of control and anxiety were the best predictors of career indecision among this population. Thus, increased self-efficacy may help to decrease levels of anxiety.

Although several recent studies were conducted to examine the nature of undecided students, the number of African-American male subjects who participated in those studies was relatively low. In her study examining career indecision among African-American students, Browne (2005) noted that career indecision was based on four factors: apprehension, having multiple career interests, personal conflict, and a need for information. She also found that personality traits and life satisfaction both had predictive value in understanding the career decision making behavior of African-American students. Similar to other researchers, however, she qualified her results,

stating that information from her study was limited and could not be generalized to all African-American students due to a lack of male participants. Osipow (1999) observed that the utilization of African-American males as subjects of career development study was sparse. As the career decision making process is pertinent to achieving career success, it was important to review research related to this process.

### The Process of Career Decision-Making

According to Tyler (1953), there are several factors that may contribute to career indecision among college students: They include: (a) the opinions and attitudes of family and friends, (b) the inability to accept the role a particular occupation represents although it may be appealing, (c) sex-role stereotyping, (d) being a multitalented individual and unable to narrow down the alternatives, and (e) the inability to accept realistic limitations and obstacles. Parents have been deemed the most influential factor affecting the career choice of undecided students (Orndorff & Herr, 1996; Pearson & Dellman-Jenkins, 1997). Parental influence has the negative effect of causing increased career complexity among undeclared students and serving as an indicator that the student is still dependent on parental input. Because it can affect one's career decision making at any given time, some researchers consider career indecision as a developmental stage. Osipow (1999) defined career indecision as "a state which comes and goes over time as a decision is made, is implemented, grows obsolete, and eventually leads to the need to make a new decision (producing a temporary state of indecision)" (p. 147). In a more

general sense, researchers Germeijs and De Boeck (2003) defined career indecision as problems that occur during the career decision-making process.

Just as career decision making can prove daunting for many students, researchers' attempts at understanding the nature of career indecision can be difficult as well. Holland and Holland (1977) wrote that "Attempts to comprehend the vocational decisiveness of some students and the indecisiveness of others are characterized by conflicting findings, negative findings, or negligible findings" (p. 404). Although extensive, researchers have identified even more factors that lead to career indecision. As a result of their research, Kelly and Lee (2002) found that problems of information deficits and identity diffusion, trait indecision and choice anxiety, and conflicts or disagreements with others that inhibit the implementation of a career choice were all reasons that lead to career indecision. Although each of the aforementioned reasons can contribute to career indecision, African Americans have consistently noted that racial discrimination, financial problems, and study skills were the most problematic barriers to career decision making (Luzzo, 1993). Luzzo also asserted that balancing work demands, family, and job discrimination were also great concerns of this population.

In their research, Germeijs and De Boeck (2003) sought to relate research on career indecision to the decision-making process. Their work was focused on three sources of career indecision. The first was a lack of information which refers to

one or a combination of the following: not having a view on the possible alternatives, not knowing the attributes of the alternatives, and not having enough information about the alternatives and their outcomes in order to evaluate their attributes with respect to the objectives. (Germeijs & De Boeck, p. 12).



According to the investigators, the second source of career indecision was related to valuation problems. These problems include value uncertainty, value conflict, and evaluative evenness (Germeijs & De Boeck, 2003). The third source of indecision stemmed from one's uncertainty about the outcomes of their choices and whether or not one has the capability of bringing that choice to a good end. Germeijs and De Boeck also cited the lack of information about self as yet another possible category that adds to career decision-making difficulty. They elaborated, stating that "Lack of information about the self is related to value unclarity (second source) and to uncertainty about one's capability to bring a choice to a good end (third source)" (Germeijs & De Boeck, 2003, p. 13).

Unresolved identity issues may be yet another factor that leads to career indecision. Holland (1997) defined identity as "the possession of a clear and stable picture of one's goals, interests, and talents" (p. 5). According to Holland and Holland (1977), overcoming difficulties with career decision making may become more possible as individuals resolve issues of identity crisis. In their research, they determined that undecided persons lacked work involvement, self-reliance, communication skills, and were less involved with peers, family, and school. Helms and Cook (1998) also found that due to one's identity development, students may lack skills necessary to acquire and process information important in making appropriate vocational choices. According to Blustein et al. (1989), "Determining an occupational identity represents one of the central challenges of the identity formation process in late adolescence" (p. 197).

According to researchers (Fouad & Arbona, 1994; Okocha, 2003), ethnic identity promotes one's self-concept and, as such, informs career choices. Duffy and Klingaman (2009) wrote that, "Students with a stronger defined self-concept are proposed to have higher levels of career maturity and are more decided in their vocational decisions" (p. 288). They also reported that African Americans with higher levels of ethnic identity achievement may be more firm in their career choices. This may be due to the fact that students from this population may have a more defined sense of self. One limitation of the study may have been the failure to include oppression in the assessment, as this construct may have a significant impact on the career development process of students of color. Rollins and Valdez (2006) also explored the relationship between ethnic identity achievement and career decision-making self-efficacy and found a moderate correlation among the constructs. Gloria and Hird (1999) had earlier examined the relationship of ethnic identity and career decision-making self-efficacy among college students. Their results suggested that ethnic identity may have a significant but weak relationship with career decision self-efficacy among students of color.

Researchers Brown and Saks (1985) posited that socio-economic status was a key determinant in the career choice of African Americans. Data utilized in this study indicated that "Approximately one-half of the African American and Hispanic college-age population in the U.S. are from families with incomes below the national poverty level, and therefore many of these students must forego a college education" (Mosidi & Murry, 1993, p. 442). Luzzo (1993) also found that finances (or lack thereof) were also perceived as a significant barrier and a key determinant in career choice among African

American students. Kerka (2003) viewed a lack of developmental feedback, discrimination, hostility, less access to training, and stress as potential barriers to the career development of diverse populations.

In yet another study, it was noted that career decision-making self-efficacy made the largest contribution to the variance in both the social and academic integration of underprepared students (Peterson, 1993). Career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE) identifies the extent to which students have confidence (self-efficacy) in their ability to engage in stable and consistent occupational and educational planning and decision-making (Delmas & Peterson, 2001; Gianakos, 1999). According to Paulsen and Betz (2004), the task domains of career decision-making self-efficacy were: (a) self-appraisal, (b) gathering occupational information, (c) goal selection, (d) planning, and (e) problem solving. They found that career decision-making self-efficacy may be related to self-efficacy and that self-efficacy increased as one completed the aforementioned tasks. Their results indicated that leadership was the best predictor of career decision-making self-efficacy, but that mathematics, science, and the use of technology were also important predictors of career decision-making self-efficacy for African-American male students. Gianakos (1999) discussed the importance of quality exploration as the basis of career decision-making self-efficacy. It was her recommendation that one fully engage in the process of exploration in order to positively influence career choice.

Mau (2000) also examined the constructs of career decision-making self-efficacy and career decision-making style. Mau's work was based on Harren's typology of decision-making styles. This typology proclaims that there are "three decision-making

styles that represent distinct sets of attitudes and behaviors used in decision-making tasks and vary as a function of the degree to which individuals take personal responsibility for decision making” (Mau, 2000, p. 366). These styles are (a) rational, which alludes to making decisions deliberately and logically; (b) intuitive, which means making decisions based on feelings and emotional satisfaction; and (c) dependent, which enables decision making based on the expectations and opinions of others (Mau, 2000). Of the three styles, the rational decision-making style is associated with being the most effective approach and was positively associated with self-efficacy measures. Mau’s research revealed that career decision-making style has been significantly associated with career decision-making self-efficacy. He found that students with a rational decision making style were more competent in making career decisions. However, he noted that other research findings, in regards to the rational decision-making style, have been inconsistent and that the effectiveness of this style may be situational. His results also revealed that “For American students, the more dependent the person was in career decision making, the less confident he/she was in making career decisions” (Mau, 2000, p. 375).

#### African-American Male Students and Career Decision Making

The process of deciding on a career path can prove daunting for African American male students. According to Fuqua, Seaworth, and Newman (1987), researchers have given several explanations for the difficulty these students encounter when deliberating about their futures. Much of the difficulty these students face in regard to their career choice lie in factors over which they have no control. According to some,

“The legacy of slavery, the impacts of race and racial physiognomy, economic deprivations, low social standing, and the different structure of opportunity are critically important features of the context of African Americans career choice and adjustment” (Brown & Pinterits, 2001, p. 3). However, these researchers also indicated that although these factors could serve as extraordinary impediments to African American career choice, their effect seem to vary from person to person.

As African-American males often find themselves underprepared for the rigors of higher education and the career decision making process, it is possible that this group may lack an appropriate sense of career decision-making self-efficacy. Cuyjet (1997) listed several reasons that lead to the unpreparedness encountered by this group. They include:

. . . attending academically poorer elementary and secondary schools, lowered expectations of peers and significant adults toward academic achievement, peer pressure to disdain educational accomplishments and education as an outcome, financial hardships limiting educational access, lack of appropriate role models, and other barriers owing to racism. (p. 7).

Educational and economic systemic forces are also obstacles that can hinder the career development process of these students. According to Mosidi and Murry (1993), these forces may serve as barriers as they fail to

generate sufficient opportunities for African American men, as evidenced by overt and covert racism in the world of work. . . teachers and other educational agencies do not provide young African American males with the information they need to reduce discrepancies among the ideal, perceived, and real opportunity structures. (p. 443)

Ironically, as economic well-being has become increasingly more difficult to maintain, many African American males have found themselves having to navigate these very systems that previously may have been viewed as obstacles.

The obstacles to career decision making that these students encounter also include the messages they receive. Bowman (1995) viewed the following messages as powerful inhibitors to African American career development:

“(a) Because of their ethnicity, there are only certain career options to African Americans; (b) African Americans seeking same-race role models and/or mentors in various careers may find few or none; (c) African Americans may receive negative or discouraging feedback about careers that their peers, or their elders, do not perceive are possible for their ethnic group; (d) African Americans entering a career where there are few ethnic minorities may receive the message that their hiring occurred because of their race instead of their qualifications; and (e) some African Americans are in positions that force them to interact in a system that is alien and hostile in order to achieve certain status” (p. 137).

If left unchallenged, these negative forces and obstacles may make it difficult for the African American male to fully develop a strong sense of self. This feeble sense of self may in turn inhibit the career decision making process and make it less likely that an appropriate career decision will be made (Bingham & Ward, 2001).

It is clear that African-American male students encounter a number of challenges as they make decisions about possible career paths. Unresolved identity issues, racial discrimination, financial problems, and a lack of rigorous academic preparedness are a just a few of the challenges these students face. As these issues present unique challenges for African-American male students, enrollment into four-year baccalaureate granting institutions immediately upon finishing secondary education may not be an option for some students. As such, many choose to begin their educational pursuits at

two-year institutions. These institutions traditionally cater to unique student populations and have missions of eventually assisting with students with the transfer process. However, navigating a successful transfer process can be a unique challenge in its own right.

### Transfer Students and the Role of Community Colleges in the Transfer Process

As African-American males are likely to begin their educational pursuits at two-year colleges with goals of transferring to four-year institutions, it is very important for them to understand the transfer process. Unfortunately, several barriers exist that may thwart the matriculation efforts of transfer students. Laanan et al. (2010) suggested that “Barriers to successful transfer can be attributed to lack of academic preparation, inaccurate transfer advising, unfamiliarity of academic expectations and rigor of the senior institution, and weak transfer and articulation policies” (p. 176). Duggan and Pickering (2008) found that freshman transfer students in academic difficulty had no career path, and Kiger and Johnson (1997) found that students who lacked a career path were at an increased risk of attrition. They also found that students who were not primarily motivated by career or economic factors were less likely to persist. Another finding of Duggan and Pickering was that a number of students felt as if the likelihood of having serious disagreements with family and/or friends regarding career decisions could affect academic success. These researchers also found that the students they surveyed had an elevated estimation of their skills, abilities, and self-confidence which was

demonstrated by their encounters with academic difficulty within the first year of attendance.

Researchers Dougherty and Kienzl (2006) sought to examine four variables and their impact on college transfer. These variables were: (a) social background, (b) precollege personal characteristics, (c) external demands, and (d) experiences during college. When examining experiences during college, the declaration of one's intended major was found to have a profound effect on one's likelihood of transferring. It was also revealed in the results of the study that enrolling in an occupational major may serve as a relative barrier to those wishing to transfer. Unfortunately due to this and several other substantial barriers, the retention rate for African American males in community colleges has been less than 10% (Chenoweth, 1998). However, students who successfully navigate the transfer process and receive the baccalaureate degree appear to achieve job prestige, stability of employment, job satisfaction, and earnings similar to those that begin at four-year institutions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Transfer Student Capital (TSC) is a concept that may aid in the success of transfer students. TSC can be defined as the experiences of community college students who transfer to four-year institutions. It indicates how community college students accumulate knowledge in order to negotiate the transfer process and includes such activities as: understanding credit-transfer agreements between colleges, course prerequisites, and grade requirements for admission into a desired major (Laanan et al., 2010). According to Laanan et al., the more TSC a student possesses the greater is the likelihood of successful transfer from a community college to a four-year institution.



Because deciding on a major is a significant component of gaining TSC, it is particularly important that undecided transfer students engage in the career development process. Along with possessing TSC, Berger and Melaney (2003) found that the manner in which students prepare to transfer seems to be as much a factor in their high satisfaction rates as the actual levels of involvement with the university. Adjustment to the university, in terms of satisfaction and academic performance, was most influenced by how well transfer students were prepared for the transfer process. It was also revealed that white students tended to receive higher grades and were more likely to be satisfied with their overall university experience than were other groups of students. This result further suggests the need for research that provides insight into the needs of African-American male transfer students. Because community colleges provide the TSC needed by African-American male students for increased success at four-year institutions, it is necessary to examine the role that community colleges play in the transfer process.

Community colleges have played and continue to play a significant role in providing opportunities for those wishing to obtain a baccalaureate degree. In their conception, these institutions were developed to serve as an extension of high school and to provide transfer credits to those transferring to baccalaureate granting institutions (Bragg, 2001). Community colleges have evolved over the years, and so have their foci. During the 1980s, Bragg noted that community college leadership urged these institutions to address the career development needs of citizens.

Currently, these institutions provide vocational and continuing education, along with transfer curricula, for approximately 40% of all students enrolled in American

higher education (National Center for Public Policy, 2011). Much of the change seen in the two-year school system has been due to the diverse needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Although the mission of the community college has functioned to provide access to the majority of American youth, Bragg (2001) reported that white, traditional age males have traditionally dominated these institutions. Two-year institutions have increasingly served more diverse populations than four-year institutions and have often admitted students who may not otherwise have attended college. At the time of the present study, more than half of all African-American and Hispanic students who attend college upon graduation from high school do so at community colleges (Bragg, 2001, National Center for Public Policy, 2011). Table 1 illustrates the 10 states within the United States with the highest projected number of high school graduates and their dependence on community colleges.

Adelman, Daniel, and Berkovits (2003) found that approximately 60% of all undergraduates attend more than one college while earning a bachelor's degree. This increasing percentage may be due to the fact that many U.S. states have experienced rapid growth in the numbers of high school graduates as shown in Table 1. As a result, many of these states will have to rely heavily on their two-year school system to accommodate the swelling number of students (National Center for Public Policy, 2011). The state of California is a prime example of this phenomenon, as 70% of African-American students in this state begin their education at community colleges (National Center for Public Policy, 2011).

Table 1

*Ten States with Highest Projected Number of High School Graduates: Dependence on Community Colleges*

State	Projected High School Graduates in 2022	Annual Undergraduate FTE Enrollment for all Races/Ethnicities (2007/08)		Percentage of Students Enrolled at 2-year Institutions
		2-year Institutions	4-year or more Institutions	
Arizona*	110,650	204,731	136,298	60%
California	362,658	1,298,067	772,629	63%
Florida	191,608	230,768	589,330	28%
Georgia	101,108	145,253	266,297	35%
Illinois	118,463	409,491	363,131	53%
New York	135,742	325,272	689,702	32%
North Carolina	107,628	172,662	250,551	41%
Ohio	106,672	204,649	358,557	36%
Pennsylvania	123,462	172,417	453,884	28%
Texas	338,181	540,497	533,910	50%
United States	3,041,417	6,288,866	9,612,034	40%

*Note.* Reproduced with permission from “Policy Alert,” June, 2011. National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, p. 3. Copyright 2011 by National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

\*University of Phoenix Online and Western International University are excluded from Arizona’s results, but included in the national total. Undergraduate enrollments and completions at these institutions are not representative of Arizona’s performance, as most first-time undergraduates are not state residents.

Sources: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, *Knocking at the College Door* (2008); NCES; IPEDS, 2007-08 Enrollment File, all public, private non-profit, and private for-profit 2-year and 4-year institutions.

This trend was recognized some time ago when researchers Ignash and Townsend (2000) indicated that “Many states are promoting transfer between two- and four-year sectors to increase systematic efficiency and effectiveness in educating their citizens” (p. 1). As this issue has grown in importance, the White House, along with several other national foundations, has responded with the creation of a number of initiatives to

increase the number of citizens who are able to complete associate and baccalaureate degrees (National Center for Public Policy, 2011). A focus of many of these initiatives is the effectiveness of the transfer process from community colleges to four-year degree granting institutions.

For a significant number of minority students, attending community college provides the impetus for the achievement of a baccalaureate degree (Bragg, 2001; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; National Center for Public Policy, 2011). Students have cited several reasons for attending community colleges, including: flexible schedules, low cost, convenient location, smaller class sizes, and emphasis on teaching. Laanan et al. (2010) added that, “for millions of students, community colleges are the institution of choice because of their open access philosophy, diverse curricula offerings, and multi-cultural student body” (p. 176). The traditionally low cost of community colleges has been a significant factor in the increasing number of African-Americans who choose to attend these institutions. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2011) acknowledged that approximately 68% of community college students have chosen to begin at these institutions due to the lower costs as compared to baccalaureate degree granting institutions. According to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 44% of all low-income students begin their pursuit of higher education at community colleges. As seen in current statistics on the status of African-Americans, many are unemployed or underemployed and continue to live in poverty (U.S. Census, 2010). The role that community colleges play in providing access to higher education for those who may not otherwise have the opportunity to pursue a bachelor’s degree, is

significant as well. Bailey & Alfonso (2005) maintained that community colleges can be viewed as agents for creating social and economic equity in society for diverse populations.

Although community colleges have proven successful in assisting underrepresented populations begin their journey to achieving the baccalaureate degree, more work must be done in regards to their actual obtaining a degree. Kojaku and Nunez (1998) found that 78% of first time two-year college enrollees planned on pursuing a bachelor's degree. Although it is duly noted that many of these students plan to transfer, more than 70% do not. Tinto (1987) found, in the 1980s, that only 14% of those who transfer to four-year institutions and 6% of those who stop out but return eventually earned four-year degrees. In 2011, according to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, this condition has remained fairly static. Students who begin their education at community colleges are 15% less likely to complete their degree.

Cohen and Brawer (2003) found that transfer students often drop out at higher rates when compared to their native student counterparts. It is apparent from the review of literature and related research that the ability to matriculate to the baccalaureate degree from a two-year institution is no easy feat for many students. To successfully navigate this transfer process, one must be knowledgeable of various strategies and policies. Along with deciding on the type of institution to attend, one must also decide on possible career paths. These decisions may dictate one's choice of institution. Several theories are relevant to the process of career decision making as well as the factors that influence

this process. These theories provide support for the conceptual framework of this study, and are explored in the following section of the literature review.

### Theories Relevant to Career Development of African-American Males

#### Holland's Vocational Personalities and Work Environments

Although Social Cognitive Career Theory has been selected in this study for use as the framework from which to view the career decision-making behavior of undecided African-American male transfer students, there are several other theories and perspectives that seek to explain the career decision-making process. One of the most referenced and practical of career development theories is Holland's (1997) theory of vocational personalities and work environments. Holland's posited that "Career choice is an expression of or an extension of personality into the world of work, followed by subsequent identification with specific occupational stereotypes" (Zunker, 2006, p. 31). A major assumption of the theory is that people will choose careers that are congruent with their views of themselves and their occupational preferences. His theory characterizes people by their similarity to the six different personality types: (a) realistic, (b) investigative, (c) artistic, (d) social, (e) enterprising, and (f) conventional (Holland, 1997; Zunker, 2006). According to Holland, "The more closely a person resembles a particular type, the more likely he or she is to exhibit the personal traits and behaviors associated with that type" (p. 1). In the Holland model, people's work environments can also be characterized by their resemblance to six model environments: (a) realistic, (b)

investigative, (c) artistic, (d) social, (e) enterprising, and (f) conventional. Holland discussed the linkage as follows: “The pairings of persons and environments lead to outcomes that we can predict and understand from our knowledge of the personality types and the environmental models” (Holland, 1997, p. 2). Holland’s theory was based on four major assumptions. They are as follows:

1. In our culture, most persons can be categorized as one of six personality types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, or conventional
2. There are six model environments: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional
3. People search for environments that will let them exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable problems and roles
4. Behavior is determined by an interaction between personality and environment (Holland, 1997, p. 4).

Using these assumptions, Gordon (2007) discussed several implications for the use of Holland’s (1997) theory with undecided students. These uses include: explaining and predicting career behavior, developing the ability to organize occupational and major information according to Holland’s system, the development of career interventions, career courses, workshops, and self-help activities (Gordon, 2007; Holland, 1997). In examining the representation of African-American men according to Holland’s themes, DeVaney and Hughey (2000) found that African-American men were underrepresented in the technical or scientific occupational areas. This underrepresentation may be due to the academic rigor and preparation that these occupations require. They also found that 68% of African-American men work in realistic occupations. These occupations consist of manual labor types of positions which may require less education. This finding was consistent with the aforementioned statistics of the current status of African-American

men in the labor force. Only 10% of African-American men were found in enterprising occupations associated with prestige and professional advancement such as business and engineering (Leppel, 2001).

Although Holland's (1997) theory of vocational personalities and work environments has been one of the most utilized career development theories, there have been some criticisms concerning its application to persons of color, in particular African-American males. One of the assumptions underlying the theory suggests that people search for environments that allow them to express their skills, abilities, attitudes and values (Holland, 1997). However, it is plausible that African-American males may choose career paths based on other reasons such as financial stability and economic return. Several researchers have observed that one-half of college-age African-American students are from families that fall below the poverty line (Mosidi & Murry, 1993). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011), African-Americans occupy some of the highest levels of unemployment. When employed, members of this group tend to be represented in blue-collar types of positions (Hargrow & Hendricks, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; U.S. Census, 2011). These positions generally consist of service related, lower wage occupations that rarely offer opportunity for advancement and increased pay.

As many African-American students hail from low-income households where members of their family may be employed in these types of occupations, it is possible that these economic disparities have significant influence on the career development of African-American male students. Brown and Saks (1985) agreed with this sentiment in their discussion of socio-economic status as a key determinant in the career choice of



African-Americans. From this perspective, although African-American male students may want to choose careers congruent with them as individuals, they may elect to choose careers that will increase the likelihood of obtaining financial and economic security. As such, their choice of a major may be relative to a career that will grant increased financial outcomes. It is possible that students who find themselves in this predicament may remain undecided in their career choice for some time. The applicability of Holland's (1997) theory to persons of color may also be questioned when considering the characteristics of person and environment including: age, gender, ethnicity, geography, social class, educational attainment, and intelligence. Each of these variables can have significant impact on one's career choice and have the possibility of reducing the range of possible careers one may pursue.

#### Super and the Construct of Self-Concept

Along with Holland's (1997) theory of vocational personalities and work environments, Super's (1957) self-concept theory is another one of the most recognized of the career development theories. According to Super's theory, as one's interpersonal experiences widen, so do his or her identifications, and a concept of self emerges (Super, 1957; Super, Starishevsky, Matlin, & Jordan, 1963; Zunker, 2006). Super further detailed this phenomenon in his statement that "Aspects of the self-concept which bring satisfaction are retained, while those which do not bring gratification are in due course rejected and replaced by traits and behaviors which stand the test of reality" (Super, 1957, p. 81). The vocational self-concept

develops through physical and mental growth, observations of work, identification with working adults, general environment, and general experiences. . . as experiences become broader in relation to awareness of the world of work, the more sophisticated vocational self-concept is formed. (Zunker, 2006, p. 53)

According to the theory, the vocational self-concept is only a portion of the total self-concept. However, this more sophisticated self-concept is what will help to establish the career pattern that one will follow throughout life (Super, 1957; Super et al., 1963; Zunker, 2006).

Super (1957) conceptualized people working to satisfy three major needs: human relations, work, and livelihood. The first need, human relations, assumes that “People are happiest when their relations with other people are satisfying” (Super, 1957, p. 3). These human relations needs include such concepts as: recognition as a person and status. According to Super, in order to satisfy this need, one must gain independence, fair treatment, and an opportunity for self-expression. The second need that must be satisfied is that of work. This need assumes individuals will strive to obtain interesting work activity and a satisfying work situation. The tasks associated with these goals would include finding work that allows for the opportunities of self-expression, as well as the opportunity to use one’s skills and knowledge (Super, 1957). The final need, according to Super, that must be satisfied is that of livelihood. The concept of livelihood is defined by the need to earn a living and encompasses both present and future needs such as current earnings and economic security. In his research, Super detailed the importance of this particular need to work. He stated,

When one cannot earn a living, or when one’s earnings are close to the subsistence level, other needs, such as those we have been discussing, lose some of their importance. But once the basic needs of livelihood are met, human

relations and the work itself become at least equally important. (Super, 1957, p. 12)

This statement is particularly relevant to the current status of African-American men as many are either unemployed or underemployed.

Gianakos (1999) provided an excellent description of Super's theory of self-concept in relation to career choice. She wrote, "His theory posits that career choices are implementations of attempts to actualize the skills, talents, and interests reflective of one's self-concept and are based on the completion of developmentally appropriate vocational tasks" (p. 245). Within his theory of life patterns, Super (1957) detailed four career patterns that reflect the influence of self-concept. The first pattern is "stable" which is characterized by one who chooses and enters a career early and permanently. Gianakos observed that researchers have found this pattern to be the norm. The second pattern is "multiple trial" and involves moving from one stable career path to another (Gianakos, 1999). The third pattern is "conventional" which involves experimenting with more than one career choice before selecting a permanent one. The fourth and final pattern is "unstable." This pattern is characterized by a series of trial career choices with no ideas of permanency (Super, 1957).

Although these theories have made significant contributions to the awareness and understanding of career development processes, they may not fully apply to the experience of African American male students. Weiler (1997) discussed the dilemma, stating that, "Much of the past research on career development has been conducted on groups of young white men, although career experts now question its applicability to development of career programs for women and racial and ethnic minorities" (p. 1).

Kerka (2003) concurred in her research, noting that most career development theories lack applicability to diverse populations. She suggested that that this may be due to the lack of career-related research utilizing diverse populations as the subjects. Her work also suggests that many career theories may not be applicable to minorities as they make the assumption that “Everyone has a free choice among careers; career development is a linear, progressive, rational process for all; and individualism, autonomy, and centrality of work are universal values” (Cook, Heppner, & O’Brien, 2002; Flores & Heppner, 2002; Mosidi & Murry, 1993). These researchers, however, have also recognized that this linear process is unrealistic for African American men as the freedom to explore careers has been inhibited due to various factors. These factors include the concepts of slavery, racism, and segregation in this country and their long lasting impact on the economic and career development of African American males.

The theories developed by Holland (1997) and Super (1957) were relevant to this study as they form the basis of most career development theories. A basic tenet of Holland’s theory is that the six personality types develop and stabilize between the ages of 18 and 30 (Zunker, 2006). Super’s theory of self-concept notes that development occurs throughout the life span and that one’s experiences will impact career decision-making behavior. Both of these theories proved beneficial in the present study which sought to examine the experiences of African-American male transfer students as they transitioned from one higher education setting to another in pursuit of their careers.

## Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Other Perspectives

Holland (1997) and Super (1957) proposed lenses through which individuals could understand and explain the nature of career development. However as many of their subjects were white males, the application of these theories to men of color may not fully explain the career decision making behavior of African American males. According to Witherspoon and Speight (2009), there are no comprehensive models for minority career development. However, attempts have been made to describe the career development processes of minority students. Mosidi and Murry (1993) expressed their views as follows:

For African Americans to gain access and eventually succeed in any given career, they must first overcome those obstacles that account for their lower educational and economic attainment relative to their White counterparts. Without relevant programs and interventions geared toward removing these obstacles, African Americans will continue to be underrepresented in careers offering greater advancement and financial reward. (p. 442)

Critical race theory (CRT) provides a lens through which the occasionally debilitating effects of racism and discrimination on the career development of African-American men can be understood. This theory assumes that racism is ingrained in American society and appears natural to most citizens. Because racism appears ordinary, the formal rules of equality rarely affect the day-to-day accounts of racism that many African-Americans experience (Delgado, 1995). The current economic status and the employment discrimination faced by African-American males often impact the career choices of African-American male students. CRT scholars have also emphasized the examination of the specific details of the minority experience. According to these scholars, it is from the minority perspective that national civil rights strategies should be

built (Delgado, 1995). It is the hope of this movement that by exposing social injustices, the world will become more just.

Along with CRT, there are other concepts that may contribute to the understanding of African-American male career development. Kerka (2003) suggested that the concepts of world view, identity, values, and context are factors that should be considered when examining career development processes. Cheatham's (1990) heuristic model of minority career development examines African Americans from both Eurocentric and Africentric worldviews. In considering world view, Cheatham contrasted the African perception as one of cooperation and communality with the European perception as one of competition and individualism. This difference in perspectives may have significant impact on the career development process of African Americans. Although the two perspectives vary in their focus, the model does not give dominance to either. According to Cheatham, what may be disabling in one perspective to one individual may be enabling to another. In the case of African American development, both perspectives should complement one another. He also noted that the impact of the perspective depends on one's level of acculturation. In making a career decision, Bingham and Ward (2001) stated that,

If a client has an Africentric worldview, then he is likely to want to consider the impact his career decision will have on his ethnic group, family, and/or community. On the other hand, a client with primarily a Eurocentric orientation may want his or her career goal centered around self-actualization only. (p. 69)

According to Mau (2000), the culture that is more individual oriented is more conducive to creating self-efficacy, and the collective-oriented culture may inhibit the development of self-efficacy (p. 374). Walsh et al. (2001) suggested that the Africentric

perspective may be the catalyst that leads to a significant number of African Americans in social and behavioral careers. Research conducted by Littig (1968) yielded similar findings. He expressed the belief that African Americans tend to be drawn towards protected “traditional” careers which include positions in education, social work, and government related work.

Along with the adoption of an Africentric perspective, other reasons exist that may aid in explaining the rationale behind African Americans’ tendency to choose these types of careers. Hargrow and Hendricks (2001) wrote that although the establishment of black colleges was on the rise in the late 1800s and early 1900s, they were often overshadowed by the belief that African Americans were morally and intellectually inferior. To combat these inferior ideologies, “Many advocates of African American education emphasized the fields of teaching and ministry as a way for African Americans to gain respectability and religiosity” (Hargrow & Hendricks, p. 141). General S. C. Armstrong, founder of the Hampton Institute and considered an expert on Negro education, was, ironically, one of the biggest proponents of the inferior ideology and of industrial education for African Americans. His perspective was adopted by many including one of the most famous African American advocates, Booker T. Washington. Washington, the first major fundraiser for black colleges, believed that African Americans should pursue social service occupations as an avenue to serve the needs of the black community (Hargrow & Hendricks, 2001). Washington’s perspective about the career choices of African Americans had substantial influence on the African American

community. His wide-spread influence may offer yet another rationale as to why many African-Americans have historically chosen careers in the traditional occupations.

The U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964 addressed the legal barriers to discrimination, which included access to an equal education. However, Ward and Bingham recalled in 2001 that less than 50 years had passed, and the debilitating effects of discrimination remained. These effects include numerous barriers that negatively affect the career development of African-American males. Swanson and Woitke (1997) defined career barriers as “events or conditions, either within the person or in his or her environment, that make career progress difficult” (p. 434). Luzzo (1993) suggested that this definition was used by most career development researchers and tended to treat intrapersonal and contextual barriers as equivalent concepts. These barriers include: external barriers (unsafe environment, low income, negative social support, and discrimination); internal barriers (negative self-efficacy, negative academic support, perception of equal opportunity); external resources (role models, social and cultural support); and internal resources (bicultural competence, coping efficacy). Researchers found that due to internal challenges such as few opportunities to develop self-efficacy and limited self-knowledge due to lack of opportunities for work experiences, members of diverse groups may have lower expectations (Brown & Lent, 1996; Jackson & Nutini, 2002; Ward & Bingham, 2001). One does not want to make the assumption that all minority persons share the same challenges in regard to their career-related experiences. Although many may view the aforementioned concepts as barriers to their career development, it is important to consider that some may view these barriers as challenges (Creed, Patton &



Bartrum, 2004). Regardless, there are some similarities in regard to the career-related issues minorities face. These issues include: (a) the constraint of career choices due to socialization, (b) access to guidance and assessment, (c) tracking into certain fields, (d) societal and self-stereotypes, (e) isolation from networks, and (f) early education experience (Kerka, 2003).

In the research conducted by Creed et al. (2004), the internal variable of cognitive style was examined as it relates to whether or not one perceives a barrier as challenging or defeating. The cognitive style of optimism/pessimism was also examined in the study. The researchers acknowledged the importance of the value of the optimism/pessimism cognitive style, taking the position that “An optimistic individual is more likely to view external barriers, such as financial demands, as challenging rather than threatening to their achievement of vocational goals” (Creed et al., 2004, p. 279). The outcome of their study revealed insightful information in particular for the male participants. Both optimism and pessimism were determined to be able to predict internal barriers in the entire sample. However, for the male participants, the more optimistic they were, the more self-esteem they possessed. This increased self-esteem was also associated with possessing more career decision-making self-efficacy (Creed et al., 2004). The researchers also investigated the concept of career focus which entailed career planning and exploration. It was found that internal and external barriers were significant in predicting career focus and career indecision in males.

Witherspoon and Speight (2009) sought to examine the relationship between African self-consciousness and career beliefs in African Americans. According to their

results, the stronger one's self-efficacy beliefs are for traditional occupations, the better one can predict interest in traditional occupations. It was also noted that weaker self-efficacy beliefs in nontraditional occupations predicted stronger interest in traditional occupations as well. Although not a significant predictor in African American career behavior, racial discrimination tended to weaken self-efficacy beliefs, and these weakened beliefs led to limited perceptions of career choices (Witherspoon & Speight, 2009). As many African Americans have been overrepresented in these "traditional" fields, these findings advanced "a commonly held view. . . that African Americans' perceptions of barriers, such as discrimination in the workplace, have debilitating effects on their career aspirations" (p. 891). These findings express the relevance of self-efficacy beliefs in predicting African American career behavior.

### Summary

In conclusion, this literature review has offered much insight into the importance of understanding the issues that affect the matriculation of undecided African-American male transfer students. The review provided information on the current status of African-American males, the status of the African-American male student, African-American males and issues of discrimination and retention, the nature of undecided students, and a review of undecided African-American male students. The review of literature also addressed the career decision making process with emphasis on African-American males and their career decision making process, the nature of transfer students, the role of community colleges in the transfer process. Also reviewed were a number of theoretical

lenses through which career decision making behavior of undecided African-American male transfer students can be viewed.

As the literature indicates, African-American males encounter a number of issues related to higher education matriculation and retention that have the potential of deterring economic and career progress. There was available for review robust literature in regard to the career decision making process, undecided students, and transfer students. There was, however, a significant lack of research focused on the career decision making processes of undecided, African-American male transfer students.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This chapter addresses the research methods utilized to design and conduct this study. The research design and rationale, research questions, site location, participant selection and recruitment, pilot study, and the principles of the naturalistic paradigm and phenomenology are described in this chapter. The processes associated with the data analysis, Institutional Review Board (IRB) authorization, and originality score are also explained.

### Research Design and Rationale

This research study was conducted using a qualitative research design. The purpose of qualitative study is to understand the subject of the study. Stake (2010) added to this observation as he noted that qualitative research is “interpretive, experience based, situational, and personalistic” (p. 31). When discussing the essence of qualitative research, Stake explained that it is “an expectation that phenomena are intricately related to many coincidental actions and that understanding them requires a wide sweep of contexts: temporal and spatial, historical, political, economic, cultural, social, personal” (p. 31). As this study was conducted to investigate the influences and challenges experienced by a number of African-American male transfer students, it was necessary to examine many of the previously mentioned concepts in order to gain a holistic

perspective of this issue. The pursuit of this holistic perspective further supports the rationale for the use of qualitative research.

There were three goals associated with the research. The first goal was to reveal themes consistent with the experiences African-American male transfer students have when selecting a major. A second goal was to gain insight into experiences in the transfer process that serve as influences on or barriers to career development. The final goal of the study was to gain further insight into the experiences of African-American male transfer students that lead to the development of career decision-making self-efficacy. Lent et al., (2000) stated that because opportunities, resources, and barriers are subject to one's perceptions and interpretations, "It is important to attend to the person's active phenomenological role in processing both positive and negative environmental influences" (p. 37).

Of the various qualitative methods, the method of phenomenology research was employed in this study. According to Giorgi (1985), this particular research design seeks to investigate, describe, and understand objects of interest. Schutz (1967), the father of phenomenological sociology, described phenomenological research as a method of understanding the features of the social world as experienced by ordinary people following their daily routines (1967). As this study sought to uncover and understand themes related to the personal experiences of undecided African-American male transfer students, the utilization of the phenomenological qualitative methodology was logical.

### Research Questions

The questions in this study were used to examine the experiences that influence the career decision making behavior of undecided African-American male transfer students. As these students encounter a number of barriers, their ability to overcome these obstacles is paramount to their success. Social cognitive career theory explores cognitive variables such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations and how those variables interact with other personal aspects such as gender, ethnicity and barriers. As such, the research questions and research protocol were intuitively crafted from this perspective. The following questions were used to guide the development of the study.

1. How do African American males construct the process of selecting a major appropriate to their career aspirations?
2. What experiences encountered by African American males in the transfer process influence major/career development?
3. What experiences lead to the development of career decision making self-efficacy?

### Site Location

The data utilized in this study were gathered from students enrolled at the University of Central Florida which is the second largest state supported public university in the country. More than 58, 000 students attend the university, and 9.6% are African-American. Of this number, 2,418 are African-American males. The university is situated about 13 miles east of downtown Orlando and offers a plethora of undergraduate degrees.

As the university is one of the newest in the state of Florida, the campus reflects contemporary architecture, expansive green space, and modern residential and recreational facilities.

The interviews for this study were conducted in the new Career Services and Experiential Learning building. The building is one of the newest facilities on campus and is centrally located on the Memory Mall. With its breathtaking glass façade, the building evokes mixed feelings. It was anticipated that the beauty and splendor of the building would be inviting to some participants who would be eager to enter. Others, however, were expected to find the building somewhat intimidating and be hesitant to visit. This observation is relevant, as the population of this study historically utilizes Career Service centers less than other students.

The office of the researcher was the site chosen for the interviews. The office is warm, inviting, and reflects notions of success. A number of glass framed degrees, certificates, and awards adorn the walls. Relics of college days such as fraternity paraphernalia suggest someone that clearly enjoys college life. The round table and two chairs that sit across from the contemporary redwood desk suggest that conversations are welcomed.

### Participant Selection and Recruitment

This study was conducted to examine a unique phenomenon, and the students selected to participate in the study were unique as well. The participants in this study were current African-American male students who transferred to the University of

Central Florida after attending a two-year college. The status of being an undecided student is also relevant to this study. However as Gordon (2005) suggested, approximately 75% of undergraduate students are undecided about their major and/or career choice at some point. Therefore, for purposes of this study, students met the following criteria: (a) African-American male, (b) 18 years or older, (c) transfer student from a two-year institution, (d) undecided at some point about major/career choice. Upon consideration of participation, the subjects were provided an information packet that included information about the purpose and goals of the study, relevant contact information, and an informed consent form. Relevant communication documents are provided in Appendix B.

Although the student population being investigated deserved much attention, recruiting students to participate required diligence, as the number of African-American male transfer students from two-year institutions was a small population from which to sample. However, as this was a qualitative study, recruiting a large number of participants was not necessary. As the researcher, I sought to recruit seven to nine subjects to participate in the study. Several student support offices exist at the university with missions of assessing and responding to student concerns. One of these offices, Multicultural Academic and Support Services, was contacted to provide lists of students who met the aforementioned criteria. Because of previously established relationships and a genuine interest in the topic, staff in this office agreed to assist with this endeavor. Along with contacting this office, I also sought assistance from the Office of Institutional Research, as they were able to provide a list of current students that met the



aforementioned criteria as well. Once the lists were accessed, an email message encouraging participation was sent to each of the students who met the criteria (Appendix B). Along with this purposive sampling procedure, I also relied on snowball sampling to assist with recruitment. Gobo (2004) discussed snowball sampling as “picking some subjects who feature the necessary characteristics and through their recommendations, finding other subjects with the same characteristics” (p. 449). As this was a small population, it was also very likely that these students would be aware of other students who met the necessary criteria. Thus, once students were identified, they were asked to recommend other students who might be interested in participating. Using the lists generated by the offices and student referrals, I was able to recruit nine students to participate in the study.

### Interview Protocol

The process of gathering information is of paramount importance in any research design. A researcher designed interview protocol instrument (Appendix C) was used to conduct interviews with each of the selected subjects. The relationship between the research questions and the Interview Protocol is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Relationship of Research Questions to Interview Protocol*

Research Questions	Interview Protocol Areas
1. How do African American males construct the process of selecting a major appropriate to their career aspirations?	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 13, 16
2. What experiences encountered by African American males in the transfer process influence major/career development?	19, 21, 22
3. What experiences lead to the development of career decision making self-efficacy?	5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 20, 23, 24

Pilot Study

As with any qualitative study, the researcher is the primary tool for gathering and interpreting data (Stake, 2010). Thus, it is important to acknowledge and eliminate researcher biases when possible. To assist with this endeavor, I conducted a pilot study. As access to the specific student population being examined was challenging, I asked key administrative personnel to review the preliminary interview protocol (Appendix C) and offer suggestions for improvement in an effort to increase the clarity and focus of the instrument.

Each of the administrators in the pilot study had extensive knowledge and experience working with the prospective subjects of this study:

1. The Associate Vice President of Student Services is an African-American female with over 22 years of experience in higher education. She is

responsible for an entire division of student support offices which includes the Office of Transfer and Transfer Services that works specifically with transfer students.

2. The Director of the Multicultural Academic and Support Services Office is an African-American male with over 24 years of experience in higher education. He has spent the majority of those years working specifically with African-American males.
3. The Associate Director of Regional Campuses is an African-American male with over 10 years of experience in higher education. As a transfer student during his undergraduate years, he gained firsthand experience with the issues this population encounters. In his current role, he is responsible for a program that assists two-year college students with their transfer and transition to a four-year institution.

Along with asking key administrators to review the interview protocol, the researcher also recruited two male students by utilizing snowball sampling. These students maintained similar characteristics as those in the proposed study and agreed to participate in the pilot study.

### Results of the Pilot Study

After initial contact via phone, each of the administrators agreed to spend an hour with the researcher to review and discuss the interview protocol. The meetings were held in the same location that was used for the interviews with the subjects. Each of the

participants agreed that the space was comfortable and reflected an inviting atmosphere. The meetings with the professionals yielded some interesting results that led to the modification of the instrument.

Participant A suggested the addition of follow-up questions and revisions to a number of the items on the protocol to enhance the instrument's clarity. These suggestions resulted in changes to questions 1 and 2. Participant A also noted that clarification should be made between the words "major" and "career," as they were being used interchangeably. Questions 5, 7, 9, and 11 were also added to create more precision in each of the questions. She also suggested reversing the positions of questions 12 and 13. This change resulted in a better flow. Lastly, she suggested adding a question inquiring about the resources the participants may have used to gather information about prospective majors. Question 23 was added as a result.

Participant B suggested adding questions regarding both the two- and four-year institutions' ability to assist participants in achieving their career goals. Questions 18 and 19 were added to accommodate this request. He also suggested adding a question inquiring about the possibility of changing majors. Question 22 was added to gather this information.

Participant C suggested adding a follow-up to question 1 in order to gather more information about participants' experiences. He also suggested adding questions regarding the preferred work environment of the participants. The answer to these questions would possibly allow for more insight into the participants' perceptions of the work place. Questions 3 and 4 reflect these additions. Although interviewed separately,

each of the participants in the pilot study indicated that the addition of a question regarding the participants' use and perceptions of career services would be beneficial. The answer to the question could provide the researcher with suggestions on how to reach this population. This suggestion resulted in the addition of question 24. Along with these expert opinions, the dissertation committee also made a suggestion during the dissertation proposal phase. They suggested the addition of an explanation of research for the participant in the research protocol. This addition can be seen in the revised, final interview protocol (Appendix C).

The students who participated in the pilot study also added some insight into the structure of the interview protocol. Although the interview was scheduled for 60 minutes, the interviews averaged approximately 45 to 50 minutes. Hence the interview period was adjusted from 60 to 90 minutes to approximately 60 minutes. Both participants also questioned the wording of question 16 which inquired about the consistency of their values, interests, personality, and skills with their career choice. Because question 2 requested the same information in a more clear and concise manner, question 16 was removed from the interview protocol.

### Principles of the Naturalistic Paradigm

According to Angen (2000), much of qualitative research hails from the interpretive perspective. This perspective assumes that one's reality is constructed through experience and social interactions. Angen noted that this perspective relies heavily on naturalistic methods of inquiry such as interviews and observations.

Throughout the literature examining the behavior of African-American males, several researchers have suggested the use of interviews as a method of gathering in-depth information (Harvey, 2010; Palmer & Young, 2009; Schwartz & Washington, 2002). In this study, the researcher sought to examine the meanings behind the decisions of undecided African-American male transfer students and utilized interviews as a method of data collection. Kvale (1996) validated the use of interviews with this type of subject matter, stating, “With the focus of the interview on the experienced meanings of the subjects’ life world, phenomenology appears relevant for clarifying the mode of understanding in a qualitative research interview” (p. 53).

#### Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews of approximately 60 minutes were conducted with each of the participants using the Interview Protocol. According to Smith and Osborn (2003), semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to probe and manipulate questions based on the participants’ response. Although each interview followed a sequence of standard questions, many of the questions were open-ended to allow for in-depth conversations. Prior to the interviews, the participants of the study were asked to sign consent and demographic information forms (Appendix D). Throughout the process, the researcher worked to establish and maintain a rapport with the participants to allow for comfortable disclosure. It was anticipated that information gleaned from these interviews would offer much needed insight into the career decision making behavior of this population.

### Trustworthiness

Data gathered from the interviews were interpreted by the researcher. Thus, it was necessary to employ strategies to assist in validating the information. Kvale (1996) suggested that validity is dependent upon the trustworthiness of the subjects' reports, the quality of the interviewer, and the continual validation of information received.

Triangulation was one of the strategies employed to verify that the data gathered from the subjects was consistent and accurate. This strategy also served to increase the confidence of the researcher. In his statement about the importance of triangulation, Stake (2010) stated, "It may make us more confident that we have the meaning right, or it may make us more confident that we need to examine differences to see important multiple meanings. You might call it a win-win situation" (p. 124). He also expressed the belief that triangulated evidence was more credible. According to Mays and Pope (2000), investigator triangulation, which involves the utilization of more than one observer in a research study, aids in increasing confidence about data collected. In this study, the dissertation chair served as an additional observer, reviewed each of the transcripts, and provided feedback. In addition to triangulation, the researcher employed the use of thick descriptions resulting in increased credibility. These descriptions offered direct connection to the theoretical framework examined in this study.

### Data Analysis

Information for the study was collected with the use of semi-structured, interviews. According to Kvale (1996), the purpose of the qualitative research interview

is to obtain “qualitative descriptions of the life world of the subject with respect to interpretation of their meaning” (p. 124). She also advocated that the qualitative interview process should include: a briefing prior to the interview, the interview, and a debriefing after the interview. This process was adhered to in this study. To help ensure proper interpretation, the interviews were audio recorded with consent of the subjects and later transcribed. In addition to audio recording, I took copious field notes during and following the interviews. Stake (2010) suggested that along with recording questions that arise from subject interviews, the interviewer should also record his or her own thoughts about what is being said. He posited that these field notes will serve as a resource for researchers as they begin to analyze the data and may occasionally need to reflect on the notes for clarification. In adhering to this suggestion, each participant was made aware and agreed prior to the interview to my taking notes as a method to ensure accuracy. The participants were also allowed to choose their own pseudonyms in place of their real names in order to maintain confidentiality. Although one of the committee members suggested changing these pseudonyms as some of them sound similar, the committee and I later decided to keep them in order to remain true to the originality of this qualitative study.

As individuals tend to interpret information differently, it was necessary to work to increase reliability. To ensure reliability of the transcripts, Kvale (1996) suggested giving clear, written instructions to the transcriptionist in regard to the procedures and purposes of the transcriptions. In adhering to Kvale’s suggestions, the transcriptionist was given such instructions and was briefed on the purpose and goals of the study. She



was also asked to sign a confidentiality agreement (Appendix E) stating that she would not disclose any of the information revealed in the interviews. As a qualitative researcher, I also found it necessary to engage in the process of member checking to ensure that data collected were accurate and non-offensive. As the interviews were transcribed, each participant received a copy of the transcript and was asked to review it for accuracy. Only after participants reviewed and agreed on the content was the information used in the study.

Along with ensuring reliability of the transcripts, it was also necessary to properly analyze and interpret information gained from the interviews. Manual coding was used to identify themes found in the data. According to a number of qualitative researchers, coding is an important source for organization and interpretation (Kvale, 1996; Stake, 2010). There are several approaches to interview analysis. For purposes of this study, meaning categorization was employed. According to Stake (2010), this approach “implies that the interview is coded into categories” (p. 192). The categories used in the analysis of interview data were developed utilizing the research questions which were based on the framework of social cognitive career theory and the professional experiences of the researcher.

#### Institutional Review Board (IRB) Authorization

The process of obtaining permission to gather and examine data from the University of Central Florida’s Institutional Review Board was followed. No research was initiated prior to receiving approval (Appendix F).

### Originality Score

This study was presented in compliance with originality and plagiarism policies as established by University of Central Florida's College of Graduate Studies. The expected originality score was not to exceed 10% as defined by the dissertation committee chair. According to standard practice, this document was submitted to Turnitin.com. An initial score of 55% was returned. Upon removal of my previous submissions, references, and direct quotations, a score of 3% was returned. The final score was approved by the dissertation committee chair.

### Summary

This study was conducted to examine a very specific population of African-American male students. However, it is possible that information gained may impact the larger population of African-American male students. The data, once analyzed and interpreted, were used to respond to the research questions as related to social cognitive career theory. This served as an impetus for the development of recommendations to further assist this population. The results of this research were also intended to add to the sparse research which has been conducted on the career development of African-American male students and may encourage other researchers to engage in further study of the topic.

## CHAPTER 4 PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW

### Introduction

A significant number of African-American male students begin their pursuit of the baccalaureate degree at two-year degree granting institutions. Unfortunately, several barriers exist that may thwart their efforts. The inability to choose a major is often one of these barriers. The purpose of this research was to examine those experiences that serve to influence and/or to deter the career decision-making behavior of undecided African-American male transfer students. This chapter contains a summary of the characteristics of the nine individuals who agreed to participate in the study and detailed interpretations of each interview.

A total of 310 emails were sent to students that met the criteria of the study. The criteria asked that participants be (a) African-American male, (b) 18 years of age or older, (c) transfer student from a two-year institution, (d) undecided at some point about major/career choice. Of the 310 emails, 10 students responded stating that they met the criteria and were interested in participating. Due to scheduling conflicts, only eight of the students were able to schedule an interview and meet with me. The ninth participant was referred to me by one of the other participants.

The characteristics, classification and choice of major of the participants are displayed in Table 3. They were gathered through the use of a demographic information form which can be found in Appendix D.

The participants ranged in age from 20 to 25. The high school grade point average (GPA) of the participants ranged from 2.10 to 3.71 with an average GPA of 3.27. The transfer GPA of the participants ranged from 2.50 to 3.36 with an average GPA of 2.99. The highest grade level completed by either of the parents of the participants ranged from eighth grade to a Master's degree. As shown in Table 3, students in this study appeared to do well academically during their tenure in secondary education and graduated from high school with an average GPA above a B average. According to some researchers, many African-American male students begin their baccalaureate pursuits at community colleges due to poor academic preparation (Allen, 1992; Cuyjet, 1997; Hagedorn et al., 2001; Laanan et al., 2010). As such, a stereotype that purports that many African-American males attend community colleges due to poor academic preparation may exist. This was not true for students in this study.

Each of the participants transferred to the university after receiving their Associate of Arts degrees which means they were classified as juniors when they entered the university. Five were first semester juniors, having just transferred to the university. Two were second semester juniors, and two were first semester seniors. The subjects chose a variety of majors.

Table 3

*Participant Characteristics, Classification, and Choice of Major*

Participant	Age	High School GPA	Transfer GPA	Highest Grade Level Completed by Parent	Classification	Choice of Major
Calvin	20	3.71	3.21	High school	1st semester junior	Elementary Education
Bill	20	3.31	3.00	Bachelor's degree	1st semester junior	Information Technology
Anthony	25	3.50	2.50	High school	2nd semester junior	Health Science/Pre-Clinical
Jason	21	3.50	2.97	Some college	1st semester junior	Psychology
Robert	23	3.70	3.20	High school	1st semester senior	Business Management
Joe	20	3.34	3.36	Master's degree	1st semester junior	Sociology
Jack	22	2.10	2.50	Eighth grade	2nd semester junior	Finance
Leon	21	3.30	3.30	Bachelor's degree	1st semester junior	Health Science/Pre-Clinical
Brendon	22	3.00	2.90	High school	1st semester senior	Marketing/Management

### Interview Process

As noted in Chapter 3, information was collected for this study through the use of semi-structured interviews. As a seasoned career counselor and student affairs practitioner, I have grown comfortable and adept at gathering information from students. I also work hard to establish and maintain a rapport with each of the students with whom I work. As such, I relied on my experience and confidence as a counselor to assist me with the interview process in this study.

As part of any session with students, I typically take notes to assist with the validation of what occurred during the interview. After getting permission from each of the participants, I took copious field notes, as usual, throughout the interview. As seen in Appendix G, the field notes were divided into four sections: personal observations, non-verbal behavior, my thoughts/impressions, and other. These notes allowed me to capture my thoughts during, as well as my impressions after, each interview.

Although I have grown accustomed to “interviewing” students on an almost daily basis, I found myself somewhat nervous during my first few interviews. My nervousness may have had something to do with the fact that after more than a year of research, I finally had the opportunity to meet with students and gain insight into my research topic. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The first interviews tended to proceed somewhat faster than the later. I also noticed that I often had to ask participants to expound on their responses, as they tended to answer them very concretely and often with little explanation. Although I missed the opportunity to do so in my first few

interviews, I was able to find a solid rhythm in the later interviews. To gain clarification, as well as to retrieve missed information, I followed up with each participant via email. Each of them returned information to me. Of all the participants, there was one (Calvin) who actually returned for a follow-up interview.

In analyzing the interviews, I found that I was able to gather much information regarding participants' experiences. However, there was a lack of information regarding the students' transfer process. This lack of information was due to the limited number of questions dedicated to this process in the interview protocol. Although the questions were reviewed before their use by professionals familiar with my study and were tested via a pilot study, I failed to recognize this limitation. Fortunately the interview protocol, along with my ability to gather information from students afforded a wealth of information in the remaining areas of the study.

#### Calvin: Future Education Administrator

One of the first interviews conducted for this research was with Calvin, a 20-year old African-American male who transferred to the university after completing his Associate of Arts degree at a local community college. At the time of the interview, Calvin was nearing the end of his first semester at the university. He was majoring in Elementary Education with hopes of moving into administration in the future.

On the day of the interview, Calvin arrived a few minutes early and appeared eager to get started. Upon meeting Calvin, I observed that he was very well dressed and exuded a sense of confidence. After getting settled in the office, discussing the purpose

of the research and what would take place, we began the interview. Considering we had just met, Calvin appeared relaxed and genuinely interested in the topic, and he maintained direct eye contact. After noting that his major was Elementary Education, he discussed the experiences that influenced his decision on his major. He reflected:

What inspired me was being inspired during high school. I was very involved in high school and that took me away from everything else, living at home, the neighborhood I lived in, so I was very involved at school and that just took me away from everything. So I wanted to provide that for other people and that's why I went into education. (Transcript record [TR] 1, line 6)

He also felt that his choice of major was consistent for him as an individual. He added:

I like to help others and I feel like young people need a positive role model and really need someone to believe in them. So I believe that's what I can provide for students and that's what I'm excited about really. (TR 1, line 20)

Calvin was currently employed in education administration. According to Calvin, his experience with this position has also aided in enhancing his confidence in his current career choice and is aligned with his future career goals as well.

I definitely see myself either in the district office, preferably professional development because I started working now as a college assistant so I think a senior manager or a director of that department. . . think that's where I see myself more. (TR 2, line 3)

He also added that he preferred to work in an administrative environment, and that this had also influenced his decision to pursue a more administrative career track in the future. Calvin's revelation that his current work experience and preferred work environment aided in increasing his career decision making self-efficacy was significant and offered some insight into possible themes associated with this research.

As my research intent was to explore career indecision among African-American males, I was somewhat anxious to discuss Calvin's experiences. In discussing his



process for deciding on a major, Calvin remarked that he was fortunate that he had good friends to rely on. His roommate was also studying education and had been instrumental in providing him with information that helped him to confirm his major. He reflected “He’s very successful, and he came from the similar background that I did, so being around people like that really inspires you and it definitely is a push” (TR 5, line 29). In regard to job stability, he confidently responded “I knew teachers would always be around and be needed” (TR 10, line 4).

I expect to have job stability. And also with that I know that I can teach anywhere because teachers are everywhere so that’s another thing that led me to this major because I know that once I graduate the world is my oyster if that’s how the saying goes. (TR 10, line 17)

Although Calvin was undecided during his stay at his two-year institution, he was aware of the personal growth he experienced there. Calvin was involved in a number of organizations and served as president of one of them. He was aware of the positive influence that the members of the college bestowed upon him. He reflected “Everyone at the community college is just great, from the advisors to the people in student involvement, the president” (TR 6, line 1). Although much of his experience at the two-year institution was positive, he did admit to having some difficulty getting effective assistance with his curriculum choices and other transfer related issues. However, Calvin found some degree of success through his involvement in student organizations and relationships with administrators, and he indicated he hoped to find similar success at the university. Calvin noted that his current schedule had become increasingly more complicated, and it was difficult for him to take advantage of services and become involved at the university as he did at his previous institution.

As the interview concluded, Calvin seemed positive about his career choice as well as his future at the university. He admitted that although there are several services available to transfer students, he had to learn a lot on his own.

Definitely don't rely on an advisor to tell you everything you need to know. Definitely reading your catalog yourself and learning what a degree is and what it actually does will really help with your process. . . because when I found out I was behind I found out on my own (TR 8, line 4).

Fortunately for Calvin, he took the initiative to search for information on his own and had knowledgeable peers who were willing to share information with him.

#### Bill: Future Tech Guy

While waiting for Bill to show up for his interview, I remember feeling a bit nervous as to whether or not he would appear. Bill had been scheduled to meet with me previously but had been called in to work and missed our initial appointment. As his appointment time arrived and he was still not there, I was afraid of a repeat of our previous attempt. Bill arrived about five minutes after the scheduled time. Wearing a t-shirt and shorts, Bill appeared tired. He admitted that he had worked the night before and was actually a little tired. I thanked him for coming and let him know how appreciative I was that he made the effort to meet with me even though he was juggling a hectic schedule. According to Bill, he was happy to help.

Bill was in his first semester at the university and had transferred to the university after completing his Associate of Arts degree at a local community college. He was studying Information Technology and seemed confident in his career choice. After exchanging a few pleasantries and discussing the purpose of the research, we began the

interview by discussing the experiences that influenced his decision to pursue a career in Information Technology. He paused for a moment and reflected: “Basically growing up I was more geared towards computers, so it was just when I got to college it was kind of understood that that’s what I was going to do” (TR 1, line 6). He added “I am really passionate about computers, so it would make sense for someone who works so much on computers and is always on one to major in a computer related major” (TR 1, line 13). Bill also spoke about the influence his family had on his career choice. “I think one of my uncles, he did computer engineering at MIT, and then my other uncle he did information technology at Florida State, so I decided just to do Information Technology” (TR 1, line 9).

Along with childhood interests and family influences, Bill also spoke of the influence his future career and life goals had on his choice.

To some degree I would say family but also just my goals like career wise I want to be a systems administrator and I want to work corporate. I kind of want to move. I want to move into like a downtown setting or something like that. I know lots of corporate businesses operate in environments like that and that’s where I ideally want to live also. I guess my life goals kind of affected my career choice, like what I want to do and where I want to live. (TR 3, line 3)

The flexibility that his career choice offers also played a part in his decision to major in Information Technology. “There’s a lot of flexibility with my career” (TR 3, line 8).

When asked if this flexibility was influential in his choice, he responded:

Yeah. I would say so because I probably wouldn’t have wanted to make this career choice if it didn’t have the flexibility. If I had to like I can’t really compare it to a different career. I guess teaching. You’re not going to work in a downtown environment. You’re going to work in a residential setting in an area like that, so just I’d say the flexibility had a lot to do with it because it is a big positive compared to other jobs because you don’t have that flexibility. (TR 3, line 11)

He seemed to be a bit nervous and had been rattling a copy of the interview protocol in his hands since the beginning of the interview. He also added that his academic ability also played a part in his career decision-making process.

I probably wouldn't do this if I wasn't comfortable taking most of the classes, because I would think most people aren't comfortable with the classes that you have to take with IT. There's lots of programming and logic classes and things that you have to like strong logic skills so I doubt that I wouldn't take if I didn't have the logic skills. I definitely probably wouldn't take this major. (TR 4, line 4)

As I was curious about Bill's experience at his previous institution, our conversation began to shift. Bill explained that he stayed at this previous institution until he finished his Associate's degree but was not necessarily focused on his career at the time. He reflected:

I wanted to just continue to the four-year. So I really wasn't thinking about getting into the career. It was just because it's a segway to going into the four-year college. Career goals, it really wasn't important. You're just mostly getting the associates to get the bachelors. (TR 6, line 8)

However, he did admit that the classes he took at his two-year institution helped to increase his confidence in his career choice.

I would say when I was at [two-year college] we had a programming class, and I guess it's everybody who wants to be in computer science or It people and I did pretty well compared to the rest of the students. I didn't have as much questions and I got an A in the class. So that alone, like doing well against my peers, made me more confident. (TR 5, line 25)

In regard to his experiences with the transfer process, Bill reiterated what I had heard previously about the positive influence of peers. "I had quite a few friends that transferred. When I went to [two-year college], a lot of my friends were there so I knew what I was getting into" (TR 7, line 1). Along with his peers, he also noted that

knowledge of a well-known articulation agreement between the two-year college and the university called Direct Connect also aided in his transfer process.

I knew the whole Direct Connect process. It was pretty simple. There wasn't much to really know about it. Just mainly do your two years and you complete your courses. That's what everybody at the school is doing. (TR 7, line 2)

So it was pretty understood. There's tons of advertising for it and there's an office at my school so it was I knew so much just getting there because it was stressed to us. (TR 7, line 14)

Like Calvin, Bill expressed an interest in getting involved at the university and using its resources. However he, too, was concerned about his hectic schedule and the extent to which it prevented him from taking advantage of resources. When asked about his use of career related resources at the university, he responded:

"I've attempted to and I know about the experiential learning stuff to some degree and I wanted to get into this semester but just starting at a new school, there's a lot else that I had to do. I didn't have time to do it" (TR 8, line 14).

Along with a seeming lack of time to get involved, he also spoke of the difficulty he was experiencing with the structure of the classes at the university, as well as interactions with professors.

I would say that there's a big difference like class wise experience that's the biggest thing, that's the biggest obstacle I've had so far. I've been dealing with the structure of these classes. They're a lot different than two-year classes, like size wise and then just interactions with the teachers because I wouldn't even say like the instructors there are instructors here but when I was at [two-year college] they were more teachers. They would be the people grading the work and the people giving me feedback but here it's usually I have an instructor and there's the TA and it's confusing. (TR 8, line 19)

At [two-year college], we had a lab and then the teacher was at the lab so he could help you with the work if you needed it. Here there's not really a lab for the programming classes. You kind of have to either contact the TA or work with the students more and even with the TA, the TA is not your instructor so it's like it's a barrier. It just kind of makes it more complicated. (TR 8, line 28)

Although adjusting has been challenging, Bill was confident that he would adjust and find success. When asked if he saw himself being successful at the university, he responded:

I mean the courses are good, it's just the difference in the way the classes are. This is a bigger school and I'm just not used to like the class sizes which is kind of what it all boils down to which is why the courses have to be taught that way, because of the class sizes. It's just an adjustment. (TR 9, line 24)

As the interview concluded, Bill appeared to have relaxed a bit. His story sounded familiar. In my profession, I consistently hear students complain about the structure of classes at such a large university. However, I was happy to hear that Bill was confident about finding success at the university as well as in his career choice. After discussing follow-up procedures, Bill left to go home and get some rest.

#### Anthony: Budding Physical Therapist

When Anthony returned my email agreeing that he would participate in my study, I was excited. I had previously met Anthony as a potential member of one of the fraternities I advise and was impressed by his status as a non-traditional student. Given the similarity in our backgrounds, I was interested in hearing his story. Anthony was 25 years old and had transferred to the university after completing his Associate of Arts degree at a community college in the state of Florida. Along with his classification as an African-American, Anthony was also of Haitian decent. It is possible that his Haitian background may also have had some influence on his career development. Anthony was currently in his second semester at the university and was majoring in Pre-Clinical Allied Health with a goal of becoming a Physical Therapist.

On the day of his interview, Anthony arrived on time with a smile on his face. He was dressed comfortably in sweats and seemed prepared. During our preliminary discussion, Anthony made me aware of the fact that it was finals week. Although he was a little nervous about the pending exams, he was confident that he would do well. As with previous interviews with other participants, we began the interview by talking about the experiences that influenced his decisions about his career choice. As one of the first participants to mention parental influence, Anthony revealed that conversations with his parents served as positive influences on his career choice. When asked about positive influences, he revealed “Positive influence, probably my parents. Basically they told me to pick something you can actually find a job once you graduate, that you’re not just out there just swinging it once you graduate” (TR 1, line 4). Anthony also expressed his parental influence in a follow-up communication via email. He noted that:

There were many conversations that my parents and I had about major choices. At first they wanted me to pursue an Engineering track, but after discussing job opportunities after graduation, the health field was a second option which is how I ended up choosing Health Science as a major. (TR 8, line 1)

It is apparent that Anthony’s parents had a significant impact on his career choice. In analyzing my interview with Anthony along with his completed demographic information sheet, I found it interesting that neither of his parents had attended college. Even so, they were still able to guide and influence their son in a direction that may prove beneficial to his future. Anthony revealed that other members of his family were also influential in his career choice. When discussing his decision to choose health sciences over his first choice of electrical engineering he reflected:

The reason why I didn't do electrical engineering was basically one I hate math and like my cousin is also an electrical engineering major. He graduated a couple of years before me. He's a little older. And he was like it's hard to find jobs like he's still having a hard time finding a job with that so he's the one person I really spoke to all the time. He gave me advice and he was like if you can find something medically related then go gear towards that so that's what I did. (TR 1, line 27)

As the interview continued, Anthony maintained direct eye contact and appeared increasingly comfortable with the process. As I approached the portion of the interview protocol that related to gender, I was curious to hear Anthony's response. When asked whether or not being a man impacted his career choice, he confidently responded:

My parents would always tell me why don't you be a nurse? I was like ahh. I mean I know there are male nurses but that's not something I would probably see myself doing as a guy so I decided not to go that route. I let my sister do that (TR 3, line 4).

Anthony appeared to maintain clear distinctions on male versus female career roles.

Similar to other participants in the study, Anthony revealed that experiencing his occupation first-hand also had a significant impact on his career decision-making process. When responding to the question about the possible congruence between himself and his career choice, he looked away and pondered for a moment. Seconds later he responded:

Therapy was always something I was interested in because like when my dad like he had a couple of incidents where he had car accidents or something and I would always go to like the chiropractor with him and see what they do. Like I was really young at the time and I always kind of wanted to do that but at the time I was young so I kind of looked past it and then geared my mind towards becoming an electrical engineer but then when I learned more about it [physical therapy], that's when I actually decided to go forth with that career. (TR 4, line 8)

As the interview shifted from discussing the experiences that influenced his major and career choices to his experiences at his previous institution, Anthony remained focused. Similar to many of his peers, he remained at the two year institution until he



finished his Associate's degree. According to Anthony, he was undecided on his career choice at that time. As noted, he was initially interested in pursuing a career as an engineer. However his unsuccessful attempts at mastering mathematics, and with advice from his family members, eventually led to him changing his major.

Along with deciding on which career path pursue, Anthony also faced other challenges. During his stay at the two-year college, there were times when Anthony did not receive financial aid. Because of the need to generate funds for school, he often worked full time at a local bank, and his responsibilities at work competed with his responsibilities for school. This led to his having to sit out a semester to accommodate his work schedule. The result was that Anthony completed his Associate's degree over a period of six years. As Anthony was finishing up and ready to transfer, he was able to rely on friends who had gone through the process for assistance. He also praised the university and its processes which enabled a smooth transfer.

The transfer process, it wasn't very hard only because of the way the school works like they're very responsive unlike other schools, say like with applications and say you need help with something. Like I would be in Palm Beach and I would have a question and I'll call up and I wouldn't have to be on the phone for like an hour just waiting for someone to speak to like they're really responsive with that. (TR 7, line 17)

Anthony expressed confidence that he would find the same success at the university as he did at his previous institution. He was working hard to increase and maintain his grade point average and had joined a fraternity. Although he has not used the career related resources available to him, he indicated that he planned to do so. He also noted that he now believed that I was a resource for him and planned on seeing me again in the future.

### Robert: Student Leader and Future Business Leader

I was excited when Robert answered my email requesting participants. Robert was a first semester senior and was majoring in Business Management. He had been at the university since completing his Associate of Arts degree at one of the local community colleges. I had previously met Robert when he was a student at his two-year college. During one of my visits to the college, a colleague introduced me to him and told me that he would be transferring to my institution within the year. He also told me that Robert was actively involved in campus activities and held leadership positions in a few organizations. Robert appeared to be a confident young man with a plan for success. He definitely had the presence of leader. I believed his participation in my study was sure to be enlightening.

On the day of the interview, Robert arrived, well-dressed and on time. Upon entering the office, he took a seat and admired the plaques on the wall. After a brief conversation about some of my achievements displayed throughout my office, we began the interview. As expected, Robert maintained direct eye contact and confidently responded to my questions. When queried about his decision on a major that would lead to his desired career choice, Robert explained that taking certain classes as well as completing an internship had directly influenced on his choices.

A lot of my classes that I took really kind of deterred me from certain majors. I took a few accounting classes and I decided accounting really wasn't for me. I also had a minor at one point, political sciences and after doing an internship for a political candidate that was local, I decided political science was not a career path for me. (TR 1, line 4)

Robert also believed the economy could impact his major decision. He explained that if he was unable to find work with his current major, “I may have to actually go back to school and kind of pick a major that would be a little more generalized that would secure a job” (TR 2, line 29). Like other participants, Robert also noted that challenges with mathematics had an impact on his major decision as well.

Initially starting off I was an engineering major but then after taking like Calculus 1 and some of those harder math classes, I decided engineering probably wouldn't be the best route for me just because I wasn't really able to kind of I guess retain and really understand a lot of the concepts that they were teaching in those classes really quickly. So I really struggled with that. So I feel like in the long run it would hurt me really having to take those kinds of classes and not be successful. (TR 3, line 15)

I found this revelation interesting, as this is not the first time since the interviews began that I have heard how the challenges of mathematics have impacted the career choices of these students.

As mentioned previously, Robert was very involved at his two-year institution and found much success. His involvement allowed him to establish relationships with other peers of similar interests as well as with faculty and staff. He paused and reflected on his tenure at the two-year college:

Through my classes just the small class sizes and interacting with my professors, they really tried to make sure that I was successful, make sure that I was doing what I was supposed to and then also in my leadership positions as well just goal setting, interacting with other student leaders that also had goals and they were like minded really helped to motivate me to make sure I was staying on path and doing what I was supposed to. (TR 4, line 26)

Just as he had at the two-year college, Robert had become involved at the university. Not only had he joined a fraternity and assumed a leadership position, he had assumed leadership positions in other organizations as well. Being surrounded by like-

minded peers and finding success in his classes had aided in increasing his confidence in his career choice. Robert admitted that although he was aware of the resources available on campus to assist with his career goals, he had not utilized them. He admitted, “Since I’ve been at my four-year institution, I have not been [to Career Services] at all mainly I guess just because I’ve been busy or focused on other things” (TR 6, line 9). However he did express intent on taking advantage of the services offered in the future. When asked if there were any lasting thoughts he’d like to leave with me in regard to his experiences, he responded:

I’m a first generation so I really didn’t know too much about college or what to do, what not to do so a lot of things I’ve had to kind of learn and find out on my own. And I mean it’s definitely been a learning lesson in the classroom and outside the classroom. (TR 6, line 30)

When Robert made this comment, I found myself reminiscing about my own experiences as a first generation transfer student. I agree that there were definitely many things that I had to learn on my own. However, I see the same determination to succeed in Robert that I found in myself. I am anxious to see where this student leader’s future will take him.

Jason: Future Psychologist. . . Maybe

Jason responded to the email requesting participants the same day he received it. I was impressed by his willingness to participate. Jason was 21 years old and transferred to the university after completing his Associate of Arts degree at a local community college. He was currently in his first semester at the university and was majoring in Psychology.

On the day of the interview, Jason arrived on time dressed comfortably in jeans and a t-shirt. During our introductions and my explanation of the research, I noticed that Jason seemed a little reserved. As we began the interview, discussing the experiences that influenced his major and career choices, Jason took his time in responding to each question. When talking about some of his major influences, he noted, “To be honest it’s almost as if it was decided for me for as long as I can remember, just people have been saying you’d make a good psychologist” (TR 1, line 5). As many of us have always had careers “chosen” for us by people who are close to us, I wanted to inquire further about Jason’s experiences. In regard to whether or not his chosen major was consistent with his person, he revealed:

That, I honestly don’t think so. It’s more so I feel it’s been chosen for me by others so to speak and I’ve just been going along because I’ve had a knack for it but I honestly would rather I wouldn’t say I’d rather choose Sociology which is what I have genuine interest in, but if I was capable of doing it 50/50, I probably would. (TR 1, line 13)

Jason appeared to remain confused about his career choice. However, I kept in mind that Jason was in his first semester at the university and developmentally may not have been ready to make a firm commitment. I continued to press for more information. As I inquired about his interest in sociology, he explained:

Once I took my first Sociology class was back in my first year in college. It really clicked with me. I enjoyed it. I loved it. I’ve always had an interest in different if you will looking at society as a whole, different cultures and such but it just when I sat down one day and thought about the viability of the field and it’s not even just from my personal experiences if I’m not going to be a professor what good is a Sociology degree really going to do me. So that’s the real reason why I pretty much just chose Psychology over Sociology. It’s more practical. (TR 1, line 18)

He added:

At the time I made the decision, I looked at just a few of the job offerings, the jobs in general related to each field and the only one I could think of even though I'm not going to say I put a lot of effort into researching it either but knowing what I could think of its just either a professor of some sort for Sociology. At least for Psychology even though I don't want to go into clinical I could become a clinical [psychologist], I could work in a psych ward so to speak. I could become a professor...it seems like there's if you will a brighter future with Psychology than with Sociology. (TR 2, line 1)

After this disclosure, I better understood that Jason was making his decision based on research he had conducted regarding future career opportunities and not necessarily his passion. This revelation reminded me of the many conversations I have with students on a daily basis. Many choose careers based on the hopes of possible job security versus a major related to their true interest. Although I understand this strategy, I also wonder if these students will ever find happiness with their career choices.

Following the interview protocol, our conversation turned to discussions about Jason's experiences at his two-year institution. Surprisingly, Jason revealed that he attended another institution prior to his attendance at the two-year institution. He was the first participant to indicate that he had done so. Curious about Jason's experience, I anxiously inquired about it. He quickly replied "If I could turn back the hands of time, I would. That was a horrible experience" (TR 7, line 9). Somewhat shocked by his response, I asked him to expound on his statement. He reflects:

The professors themselves were alright. The students were horrible. They were absolutely I guess the term is walk around with a chip on their shoulder. . . and even just the officials in the school whether it's the academic advisors, the financial aid advisors, you name it, they were incompetent. . . As long as the school had your money, they're fine. So you serve no purpose. . . at that point I really contemplated just dropping out of school. It was just that horrible. (TR 7, line 12)

Although Jason had a disappointing experience at his first institution, he admitted that his experience at his two-year college was much better. “The officials were more helpful. . . and that’s when I, if you will, my interest in achieving my Bachelors was renewed” (TR 7, line 22). However, like others, Jason did admit that he was undecided on his career goals at that time and was mainly concerned with transferring to the university and getting his Bachelor’s degree.

Honestly [I] didn’t have any. I was more fixated on just getting my diploma, not even so much as the AA. That was insignificant to me. I really didn’t even attend my graduation ceremony. I want to get my bachelor’s. After that, everything else was just whatever happens happens. (TR 6, line 40)

This statement was powerful, as it seems to be reoccurring among the participants in this research study. I was curious as to how many other students had the same priority and somehow discounted their experiences at their two-year institutions. Jason also admitted that he had some difficulty transferring from his two-year college to the university. However, many of those issues were related to getting credit for previously taken classes, as he was often confused as to which classes to take.

Fortunately, Jason appeared to be having a good experience at the university.

Although he later admitted that he is pretty shy and reserved at times, he has established positive relationships with some of his current professors, and that had aided in increasing his confidence in his career choice.

I came into class early one day, and we [the professor and I] were the only ones there so I figured I’d talk to him. He just went right along and he really sparked my interest especially when he mentioned I knew that for like [Industrial Organization] you can go into Human Resources and such but he also said you can do private consulting. He basically showed me that there was so much more to offer in the field than just the one thing that I was focused on. . . I’d say that really motivated me. (TR 6, line 30)

Although Jason has established a good rapport with professors, he did admit that he has not made much attempt to use other career related resources at the university. As the interview came to an end, Jason added that a welcoming environment at an institution (one that includes both friendly peers and staff) has a powerful impact on the ability to retain students. As he was talking, I made sure to record his words as they provided great insight into possible strategies to assist with student retention.

#### Joe: Sociologist and Researcher

Joe arrived at our scheduled interview on time and seemingly anxious to participate in the study. He was dressed comfortably in jeans, a t-shirt, and wore black rimmed glasses. Although Joe was 21 years old, he was very youthful in appearance. If he had told me he was 16, I am sure I would have believed him. Joe was currently majoring in Sociology and was in his first semester at the university. He transferred to the university after completing his Associate of Arts degree at a local community college. Smiling throughout our introductions, I was optimistic that this interview would prove to be an enlightening contribution to my research.

Explaining his influences in choosing Sociology as a major, Joe noted that “Nothing else really interested me enough to pick it. Sociology [encompasses] dealing with people, inequalities, homelessness, and poverty interests me so that’s what I gravitated towards” (TR 1, line 6). Joe was not at all hesitant in responding to this question, and he struck me as someone that would be passionate about his beliefs. He added:



Before I even thought about Sociology as a major and I didn't know it at the time, but I was reading Sociology books like regarding poverty, homelessness, and things of that nature. I didn't realize it until I guess this year. That's what really helped me to narrow my focus down. (TR 1, line 15)

Joe mentioned that although he enjoys working with people, he had not given any thought to the type of environment in which he would like to work. He admitted that he would prefer to work with others but would be comfortable working alone as well. Finding success in some of his courses also served as a positive influence on Joe's decision to study Sociology. "I took Sociology classes; two of them. The one, not Intro to Sociology, but this class called Social Problems. That really did it for me. This is what I want to do" (TR 2, line 31). During the interview, I noticed that Joe seemed a bit uneasy at times in regards to his decision. When asked about his confidence in his decision, he admitted:

Honestly, I love sociology and I know that I still kind of question it. I still question if this is really what I should be doing. I don't know God's plan for my life. He may be calling me to do something else...there's some things in sociology that I really don't just care for. In regards to like the theorists and Marxist, all that is kind of confusing to me. (TR 6, line 15)

He paused and added "I guess I'm just still not sure, I guess. Sometimes I still question it" (TR 6, line 25).

Joe noted that enjoying a comfortable salary also served to influence his decisions. When asked to expound he explained:

No one wants to have a job where you're not getting paid anything. I mean the key thing at the end of the day is that you love what you do but at the same time, you want to get rewarded and paid for that as well. You don't want to be on poverty even though you're still loving what you do. It's just, at least for me, that doesn't make sense. (TR 3, line 29).

Again, as Joe made this statement, it reminded me of conversations that I have on a daily basis with students; especially those interested in serving others as a main function of their career choice. Although these students genuinely want to help others, they have a tendency to neglect traditional “helping” occupations based on the threat of not securing desired financial rewards. Along with the desire to be financially sound, he also noted that being a man has impacted his career decision to some degree as well. “Even though sociology was the thing that interested me, I really would find it hard for me to go into nursing or something like that. . . I didn’t really think about it consciously, but unconsciously it probably did” (TR 4, line 13).

As the interview shifted towards Joe’s experiences as his two-year college, he appeared to relax a bit. Pausing and reflecting in between questions, he admitted that he was undecided on his major during his tenure at his previous institution. He also revealed that he worked a lot while attending his two-year institution and did not make much time to participate in on campus activities and utilize career related resources. However, he did note that meeting with counselors as well as being enrolled in the Direct Connect program served as positive influences on his ability to transfer to the university.

Joe reported enjoying his experience at the university and that he was taking advantage of the many resources offered to assist in his career preparation. He noted that being involved at the university was relevant to his career development. He was a member of several programs aimed at increasing students’ knowledge of resources. As far as his experiences thus far at the university, he noted:

I’ll just say that my experience overall has been phenomenal. I love the school. I love being here. It pretty much comes down to like I said earlier taking advantage

of the resources at hand. I've done that to some degree but I would like to do it even more next semester. (TR 10, line 20)

As our interview concluded, I was left with the feeling that Joe was on his way to finding his place in the world. Although he was not 100% sure of his career goals, he was aware of the need to continue exploring his options. Based on our interview, he appeared to have the tools and initiative to do so.

#### Jack: Future Lawyer for the People

I had the opportunity to meet Jack, as I had with Robert, while I was on a visit to his previous institution. Jack was working for a colleague of mine at the time and was anxious to complete his studies and transfer to the university. I remember his telling me that he would "find me" once he transferred. For some reason, I was confident that he would. When Jack responded to my call for participants, I knew that he had found me and would add depth to my study.

Jack was 22 years old and was majoring in Finance. He had hopes of becoming a lawyer in the future. He was in his second semester at the university and transferred to the university once he had completed his Associate of Arts degree. On the day of the interview, Jack arrived on time and was as jovial as he was the day I had first met him. Upon entering my office, Jack observed the plaques and certifications located on the wall to the right upon entrance. He commented that it looked as if I kept quite busy and must have found many successes in my career. I replied, "Yes, I do keep busy and am proud of my accomplishments; however, my achievements were not without some struggles and sacrifice." He nodded as if he understood.

As we started the interview, Jack arranged his chair, sat straight up, and maintained direct eye contact. Like others, Jack noted that several experiences impacted his decision to major in and possibly pursue a career in Finance. From our conversation, it appeared that having a career that would lead to various options was impactful for Jack. He confirmed my thought when he noted:

The positive aspect of my major is it's not condensed to one thing. I can explore, go above and beyond which is finance so I'm not going to be just for example an accountant. As a finance major, there's so many avenues. You could go into banking. You could go to Wall Street, whatever it may be so it's not just condensed to just one thing, one particular thing which [is why] I like the flexibility associated with that. (TR 1, line 5)

He continued "I'm not going to be stuck like in one career. I could flourish and still use the title of finance" (TR 1, line 22). Along with having options, he noted that having the ability to make decisions and influence were important in his decision-making as well. He described his ideal work environment as one "where I'm not subservient to any, I would say, irrational orders, where I'm kind of making things happen, where I feel like my vision is coming to full fruition" (TR 2, line 7). This revelation was important as it was the first time during the interviews that a participant mentioned the relevance of having power to his career goals. Jack later mentioned that he had held positions in the past where he did not have influence and was subjected to the will of others. This was not the type of experience that he wanted in his future. Jack mentioned his decision was also based on his ability to secure jobs in the future.

In the future in terms of careers, jobs, that's all we worry about. That's why we're in college...but that's why again I didn't want to limit myself to line one thing and when I get out of school or whatever it may be that thing is no longer popular or whatever industry like IT or something, something else comes up. (TR 3, line 10)

Up until this point, not many of the participants made much mention of race and its impact on their career decision-making process. Although Jack did not speak of personal accounts of experiences with racism, he was aware of its existence and the possible impact that racism could have on his career.

Growing up and being conscious that I am black given the aspects of the world. Not me really dwelling on it because it's unnecessary for me to dwell. I know that I'm a black male and I know I'm going to school. It really is not that impactful but understanding again the inequalities not only of being black but other things as well that align with I would say an unfair shot. . . .(TR 4, line 2)

Lastly, Jack detailed his experiences with poverty that impacted his career choice.

Coming from understanding my parents grew up in poverty, not wanting to be in poverty, understanding even now as a college student struggling to get by so of course I think that's the main, not the main motivator but one of the main motivators as to why I have chosen and how I want to see . . .my life in the future, not wanting to do that or not wanting to be in that situation. (TR 5, line 9)

Experiences with poverty are personal, and it is rare that students are comfortable enough to disclose such intimate information with someone they hardly know. I thanked Jack for his openness and willingness to share.

Like each of the participants before him, Jack stayed at his previous institution until he received his Associate of Arts degree. He declared he was appreciative of his time there as "It gave me the opportunity because in high school my grades were weak, so it gave me the opportunity and didn't fully filter me out from the university" (TR 6, line 23). He also credited his experiences with small classes, as well as having positive relationships with his peers and counselors as influences that aided his transfer process.

At the conclusion of the interview, Jack noted that he was confident that he would find success at the university as well as in his chosen career path. Jack, like participants

before him, exuded a certain sense of confidence that allowed me to believe him. We briefly discussed his need to begin researching law schools and the resources available to him. Although his schedule has not permitted him to fully utilize Career Services, he understands that he must find the time if he is to reach his career goals. I am sure I will see Jack again.

#### Leon: Future Physical Therapist with the Desire to Help Others

Leon was referred to me by another participant in the study. I had met Leon briefly on campus and was pleased to have him participate. Leon was 21 years old and majoring in Allied Health Pre-Clinical Sciences with the goal of becoming a physical therapist. The semester of the interview was his first semester at the university, having transferred from a community college after completing his Associate of Arts degree. After corresponding via email, we established a time to meet.

Leon arrived on time for the interview and was dressed casually in sweats and a t-shirt. He appeared comfortable and ready to begin the interview. We began the interview with brief introductions and discussions about the purpose of the research. As we discussed the experiences that influenced Leon's decision to pursue his current major, he noted that having discussions with his mother, being aware of future job trends, and having job security were major influences in his decision-making process. He reflected, "Honestly, just my mother is a nurse and I see how basically through I guess the health profession you always have job security" (TR 1, line 9). Leon is an active, fit young man. He enjoys helping others and meeting new people. These personal attributes also

contributed to his decision about his major. He noted “With physical therapy, there’s always a new patient. It’s always something new and its fun, because you’re meeting new people and learning” (TR 2, line 11). Leon’s personal accounts with physical therapy also impacted his decision. Throughout his life, he had visited the physical therapist with his father. During those visits he found himself intrigued with the experience but had not considered it as a career option at that time. At the time of our interview, Leon was shadowing a physical therapist, and this was increasing his confidence about his career choice.

Similar to other participants, Leon acknowledged that he had not given much thought to how being a black man did or did not influence his career decision. Unlike others, instead of seeing his race as a possible barrier, Leon viewed his status as a black man as positive. He was aware that there are not many black men in his field and that this would give him an opportunity to bring a fresh perspective to his industry. However, Leon had strong feelings about being a man and its impact on his career decision-making process. When discussing careers that would be traditionally male or female, Leon brought up the subject of nursing. He noted:

Not that I feel like there’s anything wrong with male nurses, it’s just a weird thing to see. I remember meeting like guys that are male nurses, it’s really awkward. It’s like I don’t know, it’s just really weird. That’s the only job I could say that I feel like that is definitely like a girl job. That and CNAs like stuff like that just is like a lady job (TR 4, line 10).

Although Leon admitted that nursing was the only career choice that he viewed as a traditionally female career choice, I sensed that if he were given a list of occupations, there would be a few more.

According to Leon, he enjoyed his experience at his previous institution, but he admitted that he was undecided during his time there. His indecision was such that he took a semester off during his tenure to research career options and to meet with people who could share insight into possible choices. Leon also noted that he did not feel as if the two-year college provided much assistance with his career goals.

They [two-year college] didn't really like give a plan. . . I've never really been to like the Career Services or anything like that, so I don't really know how thorough they are with helping when it comes to stuff like that. But from what I've seen, they're not really very excited unless you're doing a program through [two-year college] like that nursing program. It's honestly just to try to get your, like they just want you to get your AA and get out is what it seems like over there (TR 7, line 26).

I found this revelation intriguing, as Leon was not the first to admit that the focus at the two-year college seemed to be on getting the Associate's degree with little attention paid to assistance with career goals. He also admitted that the classes did not seem as challenging at his two-year college. For him, this translated in to his having to apply himself more at the university. He did admit that his previous institution was helpful in easing his transition to the university as he was enrolled in the Direct Connect program.

Reflective and somewhat reserved throughout the interview, Leon added that his experience at the university had served to increase his confidence in his career choice. He was involved in different organizations and was excited that one in particular was specifically for students interested in becoming physical therapists. He was aware of the resources available to him and had utilized many. He observed, "I've pretty much gone to everybody. I've talked to [my professor], she's like the director over there at HPA [Health and Public Affairs], and I went to OPA [Office of Professional Advising], talked



to them” (TR 10, line 29). Like others in this study, Leon possessed a sense of confidence and knowledge about his career options that should contribute to his success.

#### Brendon: Future Marketing Executive

When I received Brendon’s email that he was interested in participating in the study, I was confident that the interview would go well. Although I had not been formally introduced to Brendon, I had seen him on campus at several events. I was also aware that he was involved in several different organizations on campus. Brendon was 22 years old and was pursuing a dual degree in Marketing and Management with a minor in Entrepreneurship. He received his Associate of Arts degree from a local community college and was in his senior year at the time of our interview.

Brendon arrived on time on the day of the interview. He was well dressed in a polo shirt and khaki pants. Like many of the others, Brendon exuded confidence as he sat down and pulled his chair closer to my desk. After trading introductions and some preliminary information, we began the interview. Occasionally gesturing with his hands, Brendon explained that finding success in his classes, personal interests, and conversations with his professors all influenced his decision to pursue a career in marketing. When asked to expound on his experiences, he put his hand on his chin and reflected: “Well, it was the Introduction to Marketing course and my professor outlined the marketing objectives of the course. Throughout the semester and [with] the Principles of Marketing [course], I realized that marketing was a major that’s right for me” (TR 1, line 6). He added:

I would say another thing that influenced my decision is the fact that I was eager to learn about the applications behind marketing. For instance, what makes an individual buy a certain type of brand over another one? So for me to chase or follow that, the eagerness of finding out what it was, that's another [experience that influenced my] decision. (TR 1, line 14)

Brendon also admitted that marketing seemed consistent with his person which was another reason behind his decision to pursue his desired career path. After a brief pause, he said, "I'm a fairly creative individual. I'm very outspoken. I like to communicate and speak with individuals, and marketing allows me to do that" (TR 1, line 20).

Along with these influences, Brendon also noted that his academic ability impacted his career decision-making process as well. He indicated that his abilities had impacted his decision:

Within this degree that I chose, it's a lot of information that you have to take in, and I would say I'm an individual academically that can take in a lot of information and mentally hold it. So it impacted my major positively. (TR 3, line 21)

He also explained that performing well academically increases one's career opportunities, "If you perform well academically, you most likely will get into great careers and companies of your choosing because of your academic background" (TR 3, line 25). I nodded in agreement as I am aware that often times one's grade point average can be a determining factor when it comes to gaining opportunities.

Similar to others in the study, Brendon revealed that he did not really have any career goals while he was attending his two-year college. He explained that he is a first generation college student. From his perspective, attending the two-year institution was an achievement in itself. He reflected, "I honestly didn't have any career goals. Like I said I'm a first generation [student]. Just by being in the two-year institution was the

icing on the cake for me, so I really didn't have a set career goal" (TR 5, line 16). He also believed that his two-year college did not provide students with many opportunities to explore their respective career choices. Though he thought his institution lacked in providing career guidance, he did admit that it was helpful in the transfer process. Like others, he was enrolled in the Direct Connect program which is an articulation agreement between the university and area community colleges that guarantees entrance to students upon completion of Associate degrees. He admitted that being enrolled in the program and working with an advisor was beneficial. When he spoke of his meetings with his advisor, he reflected, "She was very helpful, resourceful, and she actually took her time to get me here because there were certain things that I was lacking in requirements. . . and she actually assisted me getting here" (TR 6, line 13). Brendon looked away and seemed to be reminiscing about his experience and appreciative of the assistance when he made this statement.

Brendon appeared to be taking advantage of the resources available to him at the university. Not only had he attended various career related workshops, but he had also established a great rapport with one of his major professors. When speaking of his relationship with one of his professors, he smiled and said, "I'm very close with my Principles of Marketing professor. She's the individual who I lean on when it comes towards marketing" (TR 7, line 13). Brendon has also utilized Career Services and several other student support offices on campus. He noted that these offices were instrumental to his success. He stated, "As a transfer student, I didn't know what to do,

who to go to, and where to go. I would say they assisted in alleviating that stress and connecting me to the resources here on campus” (TR 7, line 34).

As our interview concluded, Brendon appeared appreciative to have had the opportunity to discuss his experiences. He noted his interest in the topic and hoped that his experiences would provide information that would be beneficial to other students. He also spoke of his plans to continue utilizing Career Services and strive for success in his career. After reminding Brendon that I would be following up soon with transcripts for his review, we said our goodbyes, and he left the office. As he left, I could not help thinking that each of the participants in this study possessed a sense of self assurance that, accompanied with a desire to achieve, would aid in their ability to find career success.

### Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the participants in the study. Each of the participants agreed to share their stories as a means of providing insight into the experiences of undecided African-American male students. A summary of the demographics of the participants was highlighted as well. Chapter 5 will highlight major as well as minor themes that emerged from the research.

## CHAPTER 5 RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Introduction

The goal of this research was to explore the experiences that influence, as well as those that may serve as challenges in the career decision-making process of undecided African-American male transfer students. This study sought to answer the following three questions.

1. How do African-American males construct the process of selecting a major appropriate to their career aspirations?
2. What experiences encountered by African-American males in the transfer process influence major/career development?
3. What experiences lead to the development of career decision-making self-efficacy?

After conducting and analyzing the data obtained in interviews in a manner consistent with qualitative research methods, major and minor themes were found. Chapter 5 contains the results of these findings. Major as well as minor themes, supported by participant narratives, are identified.

### Theme Development

In an attempt to make meaning of the information gleaned from the interviews, it was the researcher's goal to identify recurring patterns in the data. To this end, transcripts of the interviews were analyzed repeatedly for possible themes. Member

checking, review of demographic information sheets, and triangulation were also used to verify recurrent themes. Merriam (2009) posited that saturation is reached when redundancy occurs in the themes and no new information is found. To reach saturation, each of the transcripts was analyzed several times to capture possible themes. In the analysis of transcripts, each participant response that could serve as a possible theme was recorded. Once possible themes for each of the nine participants were recorded, they were compared to one another. This task, though appearing simple initially, proved to be a bit more challenging than I had expected. Although participants were asked the same questions, they responded differently, often times with the same meaning in mind. As such, responses had to be analyzed several times for clarity. This often included re-reading other parts of the transcript, as well as contacting participants to verify what was said. Although time consuming and incredibly tedious, this process produced a list of themes that participants shared. Using Merriam's (2009) definition of saturation, I wanted to make sure that I captured repeating themes among the participants. However due to the varying responses (even though the meaning may have been the same) and my own subjectivity of the interpretations, I did not want to set the criteria for saturation to be so high that I would possibly eliminate major themes. Therefore, I set the criteria for establishing major themes to be those that occurred repeatedly among seven of the nine participants. Minor themes were those that occurred among a minimum of five of the nine participants. Major and minor themes were later numerically coded with a 1, 2, or 3 based on their relevance to the three research questions. This process produced a total of

six major themes and four minor themes which are presented in Table 4. The discussion of results and emergent themes has been organized around the three research questions.

Table 4

*Emerging Major and Minor Themes by Research Question and Participants*

Research Questions and Themes	Theme	Participants
<b>Research Question 1: How do African-American males construct the process of selecting a major appropriate to their career aspirations?</b>		
Having job stability/security influenced major/career decision	Major	Leon, Jack, Jason, Robert, Anthony, Calvin, Joe, Brendon, Leon
Experience with academic ability influenced major/career decision	Major	Jack, Robert, Joe, Brendon, Bill, Anthony, Jason
Experience of being a male influenced major/career decision	Minor	Jack, Calvin, Joe, Anthony, Leon
<b>Research Question 2: What experiences encountered by African-American males in the transfer process influence major/career development?</b>		
Participating in the Direct Connect program increased knowledge of transfer process	Minor	Robert, Joe, Bill, Brendon, Leon
<b>Research Question 3: What experiences lead to the development of career decision-making self-efficacy?</b>		
Chose major based on consistency with self	Major	Leon, Joe, Jack, Jason, Robert, Bill, Anthony, Calvin, Brendon
Undecided during tenure at community college	Major	Robert, Jason, Jack, Joe, Bill, Anthony, Brendon, Calvin, Leon
Career decision-making self-efficacy increased due to practical experience	Major	Robert, Jack, Joe, Anthony, Calvin, Leon, Brendon
Working independently and solving problems led to development of career decision-making self-efficacy	Major	Jack, Robert, Joe, Brendon, Bill, Leon, Calvin
Meeting with advisors helped with gaining information	Minor	Robert, Jack, Joe, Brendon, Calvin
Being involved in extracurricular activities led to development of career decision-making self-efficacy	Minor	Leon, Joe, Robert, Calvin, Brendon

### Emergent Themes for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 sought to determine how African-American males construct the process of selecting a major appropriate to their career aspirations. According to researchers Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), increasing numbers of students attend college in an effort to get a better job and to make more money. Pearson and Dellman-Jenkins (1997) noted that the ability to select a realistic major appropriate to career aspirations is one of the most important contributors to student satisfaction, success, and retention. Although the ability to select a major is one of the most important decisions a college student must make, many experience difficulty with the process. Several reasons have been linked to the declining number of African-American male students. The inability of these students to identify realistic majors appropriate to their career aspirations has been identified as one of these reasons (Cuyjet, 1997; Hagedorn et al., 2001). As such, this study sought to examine the experiences of this population as they constructed the process of selecting a major.

Of the major themes found in this study, two provided insight into this question. Recurrent among eight of the nine participants, choosing a major that offered potential job stability and/or security was the first major theme that offered insight into the participants' major selection process. Anthony, one of the future physical therapists revealed that the potential to have job security was influential in his decision to choose his major. When speaking of his experience in consulting a family member, he revealed:

He [cousin] was like it's hard to find jobs like he's still having a hard time finding a job with that [engineering major]. He gave me advice and he was like if you can



find something medically related then go gear towards that so that's what I did.  
(TR 2, line 1)

He later added that when choosing a major, "You want to get something where you'll have a stable job and not just kind of floating from job to job to job. So you want something stable" (TR 4, line 23). Leon had similar comments about his decision to choose physical therapy as his major. He stated, "You know you're always going to have a job when it comes to health because everybody gets sick no matter what happens" (TR 1, line 16). The potential to have a viable career also influenced Jason's major decision. Although Jason was equally interested in Psychology and Sociology, he chose Psychology over Sociology and explained, "I more than likely would go for Industrial Psychology. That's why I'm choosing that right now because it's viable. It's kind of booming depending on the business. That [my major] is solely based on the viability of it all" (TR 4, line 2). Like his peers, Brendon had similar comments regarding his experience choosing a major. When asked about possible influences on his major choice, he remarked, "The availability of marketing jobs. If there's not a lot of, I guess, favorable marketing jobs out there for me, it would impact my career choice" (TR 2, line 25). He later added, "If there's a limitation on marketing careers out there, I would have no choice but to pursue different alternatives and avenues until it [marketing jobs] opens up" (TR 2, line 29).

The second major theme, which occurred among seven of the nine participants, also offered insight into their process of selecting a major consistent with career aspirations. This theme focused on participants' experiences related to their academic ability in regard to choosing potential majors, specifically their experiences with science

and mathematics courses. When asked if his academic experiences influenced his major decision, Joe recounted:

Heck yes. I can't be no, I'm not going to say I can't if I really wanted to. Throw all kinds of questions at me. I really could but I wouldn't pursue being a doctor. I wouldn't pursue being an engineer. I'm not really I guess capable but I just don't have the knowledge and the means to go into like heavy mathematical and scientific fields. It's just not for me. Those are not my strengths and so I definitely would not go into a field like that. (TR 5, line 14)

He continued:

I don't do well even though I get the grades, I'm really not that good in math and I don't even like it and I don't like science either and it shows on my SAT score. I didn't do well on math at all. It's always been like that in regards to math. I always do horrible. I do good on English and the writing part but with math, it's always horrible and science, don't even get me started. That's even worse. (TR 5, line 22)

Hesitant at first, Jason gave considerable thought to whether or not his academic experiences influenced his major choice. After some period of thought, he noted:

I had a somewhat knack for science, and this is also well probably since high school I realized it, but I did stray away from it. I never did go into, if you will, the hard sciences because I am rather bad at math so I guess that also did kind of especially when I realized that psychology is mainly statistics. But with sciences its calculus, and that did have an influence on why I decided to go into it [psychology] because I knew math. I was bad at math then. I'm just barely decent now so I figured the less math the better (TR 4, line 27).

He later added, "I'm less open to trying things that I know involve an extensive amount of numbers, so to speak" (TR 5, line 8). Anthony noted that his decision to major in Pre-Clinical Allied Health in order to pursue Physical Therapy later was also influenced by his successful academic experiences. When asked about his experiences, he revealed "Yeah, with the whole math issue, I probably would have done electrical engineering if I was a little better at it. But for the most part, I'm stronger with sciences so that's why I

stuck with health” (TR 3, line 11). He later discussed his experience at his previous institution as an Engineering major. This experience also influenced his decision.

[My goal was] to become an electrical engineer. Like that’s what it was geared towards so I kept taking a bunch of math classes and I was like yeah, it’s not working out. My grades aren’t looking good, so I switched it up. That’s why I ended up being there like longer than I expected. (TR 5, line 8)

Bill also revealed that his academic talent and experiences influenced his choice of major. However, Bill’s experiences influenced his decision in a positive manner.

It’s constantly a learning environment. Technology changes every day so you’re not like you get this skill set you learn from college and then you just keep [it] forever. It’s something that maybe you might be doing something that you didn’t even learn in college that teaches you something else. So if I didn’t have the ability to be like a strong consistent learner, then I wouldn’t be able to make that [major] choice. (TR 4, line 10)

Along with these two major themes, one minor theme emerged from the research that provides insight into how this population chose appropriate majors. Five of the nine participants noted that their gender influenced their major decision. As this study was conducted to examine the experiences of African-American males, hearing their personal accounts as men was important to gain insight into the career development process of this population. Jack shared his early experiences related to choosing a major and career decision-making. He revealed the following:

I don’t know if a lot of people are like this but as a male and growing up Haitian, not only just black but Haitian, understanding that the roles of [how] I grew up with my father showing me hey you have to be a provider. That’s the orthodox role of a man. So I can’t just pick any like major where I feel like there’s no opportunity to make money. I can’t be an art major or something like that. Not to belittle any art majors, but I can’t choose that simply because it limits my scope of providing for a future family or being oriented in that sense. So yeah, it definitely had an impact being a male and understanding that I have to provide one day, if not for a family, for myself at least in a comfortable environment. (TR 4, line 19)

Anthony had similar experiences, as his gender influenced his decision-making process as well. He stated that

As a male, you tend to look at typical careers. For example, doctors, engineers, construction, plumbing, and etc. This impacted my career. For example, you wanting to become a nurse, that's typically a woman's career field of choice or a secretary type of job. (TR 8, line 8)

Joe, the future sociologist, also added to the commentary on the subject of gender and its influence on his major decision. Like his two peers, he also had strong feelings about male and female work roles. In discussing nursing as a possible career path, he revealed:

You know how it is with that being a woman's thing and all and a woman's occupation. Men are supposed to stick with manly things. I don't know, it's okay to go outside the box. I wouldn't look down on anyone who did that but I personally can't see myself doing that. I prefer to do either manly things or not just manly things, maybe office work, something like that. I really cannot see me doing nursing like I say unless I had a real passion for it. (TR 4, line 20)

When asked to define "manly" things, he noted:

Things like doctors of course, engineers even though both of those can be women too. Firefighting, criminal justice, things of that nature even though in all those things besides like firefighting women can do and I feel like they are capable and do it very well. But for the most part, those are like kind of male dominated occupations. (TR 5, line 1)

In regard to whether or not these traditional roles were impacted his decision-making, he admitted "I'll have to say 'yeah' even though I've never thought about that, before but I'd have to say 'yes'." (TR 5, line 10)

Like his peers in the study, Calvin noted that his gender served to influence his major decision to be an educational administrator. However, unlike the others, Calvin saw his gender, along with stability of educational work, as being beneficial in his chosen

career in education. When asked to expound on this awareness, he stated, “There’s not a lot of males in the classroom. So that’s another thing that it makes me want to get out there because there’s not a lot of male role models in the classroom so that’s definitely high demand” (TR 4, line 8).

The impact that gender had on these participants’ decisions to pursue certain majors was revealing. The candor of the comments was somewhat surprising to me as a researcher. As one who works with this population, the information was valuable because of the importance of helping young people avoid the pitfalls of adopting career related stereotypes so that they fully explore as many career options as possible.

### Emergent Themes for Research Question 2

A diverse group of institutions embody the landscape of higher education systems today. Community colleges play a significant role in serving today’s students. Approximately 40% of all American students begin their pursuits at these institutions. African-American males are among the diverse group of students attending community colleges. Bragg (2001) reported that more than half of all African-American students attend college at community colleges upon graduation from high school. Many of these students intend to transfer to four-year institutions to obtain baccalaureate degrees to assist with their pursuit of career success. Unfortunately, several barriers exist that may hamper the transfer process and in essence impact career goals. Students who fail to establish a major or lack a career path are at increased risk of attrition (Duggan & Pickering, 2008; Kiger & Johnson, 1997). The second research question sought to

examine those experiences that African American male students encounter in the transfer process that may influence major and/or career development.

No major themes related to the experiences that students encountered in the transfer process were found in this study. As mentioned previously, the limited number of themes relevant to the transfer process of these students may have been due to the limited number of questions dedicated to this topic in the interview protocol. One minor theme did emerge, however, that related to those experiences that African American male students encounter in the transfer process that may influence major and/or career development.

The minor theme related to this second research question occurred among five of the nine participants and was related to the Direct Connect program. The Direct Connect program is the popular articulation agreement that the university has with several community colleges in the state of Florida. This agreement guarantees enrolled students admission to the university once they complete Associate of Arts degrees. According to five of the participants, this program was instrumental in their major/career development process. Leon detailed his decision to attend the university and the influence that the program had on his career choice.

I just knew that like I knew if you get your Associate's [degree] in Florida, you can pretty much go to any school. So the reason why I chose UCF though is because I had looked at their catalogue and found that their major was pretty much geared toward what I wanted to do. Most schools you would have had to done like Sports Fitness, something like that, something really bad or just like a general like Psychology major and then try to do a Pre-Med on the side or something like that. But I just figured that [two year college] and UCF had that Direct Connect thing. Also so I said that'd better my chances also and they had that decision day thing where you find out like right away if you're accepted or not. So that's the main reason [why] I did it. (TR 9, line 13)

Leon also noted that although he was enrolled in the program at his two-year college, he switched his major after transferring. This change allowed him to enter a program that would permit him to meet the pre-requisites of a graduate program in Physical Therapy. Not only did enrollment in the program impact knowledge about appropriate majors, it also aided in increasing his knowledge regarding his career choice.

Robert was unsure if he would attend the university or transfer to another after attending his two-year college. However, he noted the positive impact the program had on his decision.

At my community college, they had the Direct Connect program and I was advised to sign up for that early even if I wasn't going to go to UCF. Just to kind of have that as a safety net kind of thing. But they [Direct Connect program] actually had like a lot of information and pamphlets and stuff around and also through student activities where they make sure you do Direct Connect. It's a good option to have. (TR 5, line 15)

In Robert's case, it appears that enrollment in the program provided him with options regarding his career choices. It is likely that success in the program, along with gaining information about majors at the university, enhanced his desire to attend the university.

Like his peers, Joe found similar success with the program. However, Joe knew the benefits of enrolling in the Direct Connect program when he began at his two-year college. Joe revealed:

Well I knew I wanted to go to UCF in the jump because I couldn't be too far from home and I knew that [his two-year college] was affiliated with UCF and we had the Direct Connect program; pretty much the smoothest way to go. I made sure that I looked at the requirements and meeting with counselors, etc and making sure that I just went through and followed the process step-by-step as I approached each step and just doing what I had to do. (TR 8, line 24)

In his quest to become a sociologist, it appeared that Joe had gained knowledge about the Direct Connect program through independent research prior to his attendance at the two-year college. Although Joe was not 100% certain about his major choice, he was able to make decisions that allowed him to continue his path to career success.

Participation in the Direct Connect program has proven positive for these participants. Having guaranteed entry into the university served to motivate these students to continue the pursuit of their career goals. Although many of the participants were undecided about their majors and future career paths, having the ability to automatically enter the university upon completion of a community college degree was influential. Guaranteed entry into the university, however, does not guarantee admission into specific academic programs/majors. For some programs, students are required to make a separate application and meet additional criteria. This could present a challenge to those students who remain undecided about their career choice and are unaware of the prerequisites for certain programs of interest.

### Emergent Themes for Research Question 3

This study sought to gain insight into the career decision-making processes of undecided African-American male transfer students. It has been duly noted that African-American male transfer students often encounter a number of challenges during their pursuit of obtaining baccalaureate degrees, and the inability to make a decision regarding appropriate career paths can prove detrimental to their progress.



The third research question in this study was focused on participants' experiences which led to the development of career decision-making self-efficacy. Taylor and Betz (1983) defined career decision-making self-efficacy as an individual's confidence in his ability to effectively complete career decision-making tasks. According to Paulsen and Betz (2004), the task domains of career decision-making self-efficacy (CDSE) are: (a) self-appraisal (b) gathering occupational information, (c) goal selection, (d) planning, and (e) problem solving. As anxiety is one of the best predictors of career indecision among African-American male college students, enhanced career decision-making self-efficacy may serve to alleviate anxiety, thus enabling these students to find career success.

As the primary focus of this study was on the career decision-making behavior of African-American male transfer students, it was no surprise that the research revealed the highest number of themes relevant to Research Question 3. A total of four major and two minor themes emerged regarding the experiences that influenced the career decision-making process of the participants.

The first major theme was that participants chose careers they believed were consistent with whom they are as individuals. As self-appraisal is one of the task domains of career decision-making self-efficacy, this theme was appropriate. Each of the nine participants related to this theme. Robert gave a detailed explanation regarding his career choice and its relevance to his person.

As far as being in management, I feel like managers really have to kind of guide and direct their employees or whoever they're managing and I feel like just in my personal life being involved in different clubs and organizations I've always held leadership positions and I feel like I can definitely relate that major with my personal life as well. I feel like I can be very successful with that in the future.  
(TR 1, line 12)

He later added, “I feel like I’m definitely a people person. I enjoy being around new people, new types of people, all of that” (TR 1, line 19). Similar to Robert, Leon also explained how his person was aligned with his career choice.

Because I’m always I guess sounds kind of corny but I’m always there to help like I really enjoy helping others and I like just doing something new every day. With physical therapy. . . I feel like it’s more geared towards what I like which is maintaining a healthy body and just maintaining a healthy well-being overall. It’ll be something I enjoy more than just oh I’ve got to go to work so that’s why I think that’s the reason why I’m in the major I’m in now. (TR 1, line 22)

Anthony was also pursuing a career as a physical therapist. He admitted that he enjoys helping people and that the thought of being able to do so influenced his career decision. After giving some thought to his person, he explained “I know I’m a people person so I feel like physical therapy is basically along those lines of helping people” (TR 1, line 10).

He added:

I prefer to work like hands-on with certain like people or patients but like I work at a bank now and I hate it being stuck in an office all day so that’s obviously one of the reasons why I didn’t decide to do something relating to offices. (TR 1, line 18)

When speaking of his decision to pursue a career in business, Jack also explained the compatibility of his career choice with his person.

That’s [career in business] where I could see myself. I can’t see myself anywhere else but like in a hustle bustle kind of like environment. Like law or something in business or Wall Street; anything like that. That’s like grinding to get yours so I could see myself in that environment because it is like the type of person I am basically. So that’s the only reason really. (TR 3, line 3)

He later added, “I feel like you go into something that you’re best equipped with, that you could deal with” (TR 4, line 33). Be it formal or informal, it is clear that the participants in this study engaged in some type of self-appraisal. Engagement in this process has

proven beneficial for the participants, as they were able to make career-related decisions congruent with their individual personalities and talents.

The second major theme found in this study related to the experiences that influenced the career decision-making process of the participants was that of being undecided during their community college years. Surprisingly, all nine of the participants had been unable to make concrete decisions regarding their careers during their tenure at their respective two-year institutions. This particular theme relates to the CDSE task domains of goal selection, planning, and problem solving.

Joe provided a detailed account of his experience with being undecided at his two-year college. When asked about his indecision and how long it lasted, he admitted:

Pretty much all the way through community college and then there came a point near the end where I had to choose a major. I chose philosophy and it really wasn't what I really wanted to do, so I went to interdisciplinary studies with a major focused on sociology and philosophy. Then that really wasn't in regards to the philosophy aspect, because it really just wasn't my thing. Then I transitioned over to just regular sociology. (TR 2, line 17)

Like Joe, Calvin also recounted his experience with indecision. As we began to discuss Calvin's experiences at his previous institution, he informed me that he had been undecided for most of his tenure at the community college. He reflected,

I'd say the first year and a half or the first year I definitely did not really know like exactly what I was going to do and how I was going to do it. And so I just didn't know what major, what route to take. (TR 2, line 26)

He further commented:

I changed my major a few times. So I mean I have been undecided for a while because I keep bouncing back into like what I'm passionate about and what I'm naturally good at and it's just kind of intense. (TR 3, line 1)

Although he eventually found some direction, Robert also admitted that throughout most of his tenure at the two-year college, he was unsure of which career path to take.

Definitely when I was at the community college level I really did not know which direction to go to. I actually took a few courses that kind of helped you narrow down what kind of areas you'd be best in. From there I was able to kind of make decisions on my own and after just taking different classes kind of seeing what I liked and didn't like about different aspects of those classes, I was able to kind of guess the classes themselves helped steer me in the direction that I felt I was most comfortable in. (TR 2, line 14)

These findings indicated a need for these students to engage in more career related research to include goal selection, planning, and problem solving while at the community college. These findings also suggested a lack of focus by the two-year college on engaging their students in career-related research. As students' experiences with indecision can lead to issues of attrition, it is paramount that the indecision be addressed.

The third major theme that emerged related to experiences that influenced the career decision-making process of the participants was the fact that engagement in practical experiences also led to the development of career decision-making self-efficacy. Seven of the nine participants noted the relevance of gaining career related experience.

Robert discussed having an early interest in Political Science. Along with a career in business, he also had aspirations of entering the political arena at some point.

Although his major was to be business related, he wanted a minor in Political Science.

However, after working in the field, his career path changed. He explained:

I had a minor at one point, Political Sciences, and after doing an internship for a political candidate that was local, I decided Political Science was not a career path for me. Even though I was still interested, I decided it really wasn't something I should be taking extra classes to get a minor in. (TR 1, line 5)

He later continued,

I felt like it [internship] was really, it was going to be a really good, I guess teaching tool to see if I really liked it or not. And then after doing the internship for the semester, I decided I didn't really like Political Sciences. (TR 5, line 26)

Calvin, who aspired to be a leader in education, also agreed that his practical experience aided in his career decision. Although he was excited about having a career in education, he was somewhat hesitant because of his limited classroom experience.

However, he revealed "As I'm getting into the classrooms and I'm getting more around the classroom setting with children, I do enjoy it more now" (TR 1, line 26). He later acknowledged his aspiration to obtain an administrative position. He revealed:

So I don't plan on staying in the classroom for long. I definitely see myself either in the district office, preferably professional development. I started working now as a college assistant, so I think a senior manager or a director of that department. I'm working more with the teachers and developing them because that's also very important for them to develop the students. So they need to develop themselves. So I think that's where I see myself more. (TR 2, line 3)

Like his peers, Leon agreed that engaging in a practical experience aided in increasing his confidence about his career choice. When asked about the experiences that helped to increase his confidence, he responded, "Just shadowing a physical therapist. Basically watching them do whatever they do during like their normal day" (TR 2, line 23).

It appeared, in the analysis of participant experiences, that gaining related practical experience had a profound effect on increasing career decision-making self-efficacy. This is an important observation, as incorporating practical types of activities into a career development plan may prove beneficial for undecided students. These practical activities may exist in the form of job shadowing, internships, or volunteering opportunities.

The fourth and final major theme involved problem solving. As one of the task domains of career decision-making self-efficacy, it is important that students become adept at solving problems in their consideration of various career choices. Seven of the nine participants in the study agreed that solving problems and working independently helped to develop their career decision-making self-efficacy.

Bill admitted that solving problems and working independently was necessary in order for him to find success at the university. His account of his experiences was one of the most enlightening.

I'm just learning every day. Like one of the biggest obstacles is like the scheduling. Like here all my classes, the tests have set dates before the semester starts. It's kind of difficult because all the classes, the attendance isn't mandatory because it's just mostly lecture slides, but then I like kind of get caught up with not going because they're just lecture slides at home so then I just I wasn't good at keeping a calendar. That's something I had to learn was keeping a calendar because they give you the dates and stuff. (TR 9, line 2)

When asked about what it will take for him to be successful, he replied, "Yeah, here I'd say a lot more independent learning" (TR 9, line 16).

While reminiscing about his experience transferring to the university, Leon also remarked about the importance of working independently. He reflected, "If I hadn't pushed myself to study, I would be messed up because I wouldn't have good study habits now" (TR 12, line 4). He continued "If you don't have the motivation to do it, it's going to be really hard" (TR 12, line 16). Like Leon, Jack also admitted that he had to learn to work more independently to find success. He noted, "I have to play a bigger part in searching for it [information] and trying to get what I'm looking for. . . I just have to network and get it" (TR 7, line 1).

Whether it's learning to organize dates in a calendar or having to motivate oneself to study, learning how to adapt and transition to life at the university is imperative to the success of these students. As challenges will occur throughout one's years at the university, one must become comfortable solving problems and becoming an independent learner.

In discussing their efforts to gain information, five of the nine participants noted that meeting with advisors and counselors at the two-year colleges was beneficial to their career development. This revelation emerged as one of the two minor themes related to experiences that influenced the career decision-making process of the participants.

Of the participants, Brendon provided one of the most detailed accounts of his experience with an advisor. When recounting his experience with the transfer process, he revealed:

Well, that was a shaky experience. When I decided to transfer, I was in the program called Direct Connect. I think that's it. However the experience transferring was a learning one. I would say a sort of challenge because of the deadlines and things that you have to meet and the requirements that you have to meet in order to get accepted to UCF. However, there was I cannot think of her name, but she represented UCF when it comes to students transferring. She was very helpful, resourceful and she actually took her time to get me here. There were certain things that I was lacking in and requirements that I needed to do, and she actually assisted me getting here. So the experience transferring from [two-year college] to UCF it was one that was worthwhile I would say (TR 6, line 8).

He later continued:

[Her] being acquainted with the UCF systems and knowing who to go to and talk to when it was time to transfer was something she really aided me in. Also she really assisted me with the I would say prepping me for the transition in a sense, what I needed to be cognizant of, whether there was anything that had to do with the log-on, MyUCF, if there was to do lists or things that I needed, she assisted and gave advice on things that I would [need] to be prepared to hand in those

documents and just the overall meeting the deadlines in turning in the applications and things such as that. (TR 6, line 21)

Although not as detailed, Jack also provided an account of his experience with his advisor. When speaking of the influences that impacted his experience in a positive manner, he remarked,

Just people who are with me in the two-year institution and just talking to counselors there and winding down, figuring out, okay I'm about to get my AA so what to do next. So the counselors over there really assisted me. (TR 7, line 15)

Participants also found that involvement in extracurricular activities helped them gain career related information. This theme emerged among five of the nine participants and was the second minor theme related to experiences that influenced the career decision-making process. Robert gave a brief recap of his involvement and how it benefited him.

At first I really didn't have any [career goals]. It wasn't until I actually got involved in student activities that I then kind of really said OK well you need to have goals. You need to have ideas of what you want to do. So, at that point I was really able to get myself together. I knew I wanted to graduate. . . and go on to received my master's. (TR 4, line 17)

Calvin also gave an explanation of his involvement and its benefits while at his two-year college. He revealed, "I was very involved. I was a student leader and I was president of our club, and so through that I met amazing people" (TR 5, line 27).

Like his peers, Brendon also explained the benefits of being involved. His detailed account added knowledge to the importance of student involvement. He discussed his engagement:



The workshops that I've attended while in school whether that's resume building, whether that's professionally speaking, anything that's bettering myself career-wise increased my confidence when it comes to choosing a career. (TR 4, line 28)

In discussing the benefits of his participation, he explained:

You always learn more than what you previously came in the room with. So when you walk out of the room gaining whatever you learned; whether that's through a resume workshop, whether that's through ABC's of Interviewing, it really does increase your confidence. (TR 5, line 3)

These detailed student accounts provided insight that could be useful in developing possible strategies to assist with student matriculation and retention. It appears that being involved on campus and interacting with peers not only helps to increase confidence in career choices, but also provides students with networking opportunities. This finding was consistent with a statement made by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005). They noted that "The most influential peer interactions appear to be those that reinforce the ethos of the formal academic program and extend into non classroom settings" (Pascarella & Terenzin, 2005, p. 121). As a significant number of the participants concurred with this observation, it is imperative that practitioners encourage students to engage in their campus community.

### Summary

The journey to baccalaureate degree obtainment is one that is not without significant challenges for African-American male students. Add career indecision and transfer status to the equation, and the journey becomes more difficult. However, the determined men who have successfully made the transition from community to four-year institution in their quest for a bachelor's degree have noted several helpful influences

along with hindrances to the process. These influences emerged as major and minor themes in this study. Having job security/stability and experiences which tested their academic ability were the two major themes relating to the construction of the process of selecting a major appropriate to the career aspirations of African-American males (Research Question 1). The experiences gained as males emerged as a minor theme relating to Research Question 1, as well.

No major themes were found to relate to Research Question 2 as to experiences encountered in the transfer process. However, participating in the Direct Connect program emerged as a minor theme.

Four influences emerged as major themes in regard to experiences that led to the development of career decision-making self-efficacy (Research Question 3): choosing a major consistent with self, being undecided at the community college, engaging in relevant practical experiences, and working independently to solve problems. Meeting with advisors and being involved in extracurricular activities served as minor themes.

#### Making Sense of the Voices of Participants within Social Cognitive Career Theory

Theoretical frameworks provide perspectives from which ideas, concepts, and experiences can be viewed. According to Gordon (2007), there are several theoretical frameworks that may enhance the understanding of undecided students. This study utilized Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) as a framework for examining the experiences of undecided African-American male transfer students.

The SCCT framework, based on Bandura's social cognitive theory, examines cognitive-person variables such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations and their interaction with other variables such as gender, ethnicity, and barriers (Lent et al., 2000). According to these researchers, these interactions help to shape career development. These researchers also note that individuals' choices may be guided more by environmental and person factors and less by personal interest.

The experiences of African-American male transfer students as they relate to career development, in particular career decision-making self-efficacy, were investigated in this study. Consistent with research conducted by Lent et al. (2000), eight of the nine participants considered environmental factors such as having job stability when making decisions regarding their career choice. This fact emerged as a major theme within the research. However, having personal interest in a respective career was also imperative in the career decision-making process of these participants. Each of the nine participants indicated they chose majors and related careers that were congruent with their personalities and abilities. These emerging themes suggest that although these students are seeking economic security, they also prefer career paths that are consistent with themselves.

According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy affects patterns of thought and partly determines one's actions and decisions to engage in a task, extend the effort, and persevere. Byars (2001) noted that successful experiences tend to strengthen self-efficacy beliefs. This study sought to examine those experiences of participants that influenced career decision-making self-efficacy. The findings in this study, according to

seven of the nine participants, suggested gaining practical experience, working independently to solve problems, and choosing majors based on personal fit influence career decision-making self-efficacy. Although specific to career decision-making, these findings are consistent with previous research on self-efficacy. Betz (1992) noted that self-efficacy is established through four sources: performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, verbal encouragement, and physiological arousal. SCCT also takes into account individuals' perceptions of their experiences as well as the actual events themselves. This is imperative as it appears that the perceptions of the participants regarding their ability to gain practical experience, solve their own problems, and choose appropriate majors helped with the development of career decision-making self-efficacy. These findings were also consistent with another component of SCCT, outcome expectations.

According to Byars (2001), outcome expectations are shaped by direct and vicarious experiences. These expectations can be defined as one's personal beliefs about the outcome of a certain course of action. It is apparent that the emerging themes of: opportunities to engage in vicarious learning through practical experience, solving problems, and choosing congruent majors aided in developing outcome expectations of possible career success. The eight students who spoke of these experiences expected job security as an outcome of their chosen majors. This outcome had direct impact on their decisions to pursue their respective career paths. Again, this finding was consistent with previous research regarding outcome expectations and their ability to influence decision-making. Pope-Davis and Hargrove (2001) revealed that expectations encompass varying

values such as the ability to make money. The expectation to make certain amounts of money is a value that many of the participants shared that impacted their career decision-making self-efficacy.

As SCCT requires an examination of the interaction of variables such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations with gender and race, it is important to analyze findings related to these concepts as well. The findings in this study regarding the participants' experiences with gender and its influence on career decision-making self-efficacy proved interesting. The findings were in contrast to Thomas' (1984) findings regarding the career paths of African-American males. He found that African-American males attending PWIs were more likely to choose traditional careers in the social sciences than careers in non-traditional industries such as biological, technical, and natural science fields. Similarly, other researchers have found that African-American males tend to seek careers in social occupations and are oriented towards low-prestigious occupations (Brown, 1995; Brown & Pinterits, 2001; Smith, 1980). In contrast, the majority of African-American males in this study were seeking degrees in career choices that would typically be labeled "non-traditional" for African-American males. Of the nine participants in the study, six were pursuing careers in business, technical, and allied health fields. The remaining three were pursuing careers in the social sciences.

These results may indicate a shift in the manner in which African-American males are pursuing career paths. The service types of positions have been labeled as traditional for African-American males as these positions typically boast the highest numbers of African-American male employment. These positions also boast lower salaries and often

do not require a baccalaureate degree. Because 21<sup>st</sup> century African-American male students have a desire for financial stability and security, their occupations of choice may be shifting to accommodate these desires.

The findings in this study regarding the interaction of career decision-making self-efficacy and race proved interesting as well. Of the participants in the study, only three mentioned the influence that their experiences with race had on their career decision-making ability. Although each of them acknowledged that being African-American could possibly hinder their careers at some point, this thought did not serve as a significant influence on their decision-making process regarding their careers. One participant went so far as to mention that he had “never really thought about it” when discussing race and its impact on his career decision-making process.

African-American males have consistently emerged as an endangered group in regard to baccalaureate degree obtainment and their ability to obtain economic security. However, the majority of subjects in this study did not seem concerned with this reality. This finding echoes the perspective of a preeminent sociologist, Dr. William Julius Wilson. He, supported by other research, has posited that both institutional and cultural systems must be analyzed in order to increase equal opportunities for advancement (Wilson, 2009). When analyzing the influences that impacted the career decision-making behavior of these students, job security and experiences testing academic ability were more influential than race. According to the literature, both of these factors (job security and academic ability) are significantly influenced by institutional structures. As such, in order to increase opportunities for economic stability for African-American males, both

cultural and institutional forces must be analyzed. The findings of this study are sure to add to the controversial discourse regarding the impact of race on the lives of today's African-American male students.

## CHAPTER 6 RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine those experiences that influenced the career development process of undecided, African-American male transfer students. The researcher's experience as a career counselor, the literature review and findings of this study provided interesting perspectives for examining the career decision-making behavior of these students and led to the recommendations and implications offered in this chapter. Recommendations and implications for policy and practice have been developed for community college students, student affairs professionals, and higher education administrators. Also offered are recommendations for future research. It is the hope that these recommendations will aid in the matriculation and retention of African-American and other transfer students in their quest to attain their career goals.

### Recommendations and Implications for Policy and Practice

#### Community College Students

The interviews with the participants shed needed insight into the experiences of African-American male transfer students in their quest for career success. As one may expect, it appears from the emerging themes that student concerns varied according to their location. At the community college, many of the participants seemed to focus on obtaining the Associate's degree and transferring to the senior institution. In many cases, not much thought was given to achieving career goals. It was almost as if the participants



assumed that much of their career focus would occur at the four-year institution. As Super (1957) indicated, students' vocational concepts develop as they mature and through their encounters in various experiences. Community college students are likely to have matriculated upon graduation from high school. As such, their vocational related experiences may be limited, and this, in turn, can limit their focus on reaching their career goals.

Like all students at this stage of development, it is important for transfer students to engage in career research which includes gaining practical experience early in their college careers. This type of experience can come in several forms including job shadowing experiences, volunteering, working part-time, participating in internship programs, and taking introductory courses. As was the case in this study, students who engage in these types of experiences often developed increased levels of career decision-making self-efficacy. However, community colleges may or may not operate formal programs to engage students in these types of opportunities. As such, these students may need to seek out these experiences on their own.

Based on the findings in the study, it appears that many transfer students remain undecided on their majors and their career choices during their community college years, and this is typical for many students, transfer or not. It is imperative that these students engage in self-assessment related activities. These assessments can be formal or informal and are used to gain insight into one's values, interests, personality, and skills. Once these aspects of self are gathered, an assessment tool can aid in comparing the findings with careers that are congruent with those aspects. Several tools exist to assist students

with this process. The motivated student can access these types of instruments by simply completing a search on the internet. These assessments can also be accessed by visiting the career services office at one's respective institution. From my experience working with many of the local community colleges in the area, as well as my personal experience working at a community college, I know that these services exist. Although many offices participate in outreach types of activities to engage students, students may still need to take responsibility for seeking out opportunities for self-assessment.

According to the majority of students in this study, academic ability had significant influence on their career choices. Many of the participants neglected to pursue certain career paths based on their lack of confidence in succeeding in mathematics and science courses. This finding was consistent with previous research in which it was found that African-American male students often find themselves unprepared for the rigors of higher education based on poor academic preparation (Cuyjet, 1997; Garibaldi, 2007). As discussed in the literature review, many of the more lucrative occupations, which would allow for the job security and financial freedom that these students are seeking, are those of a more technical and scientific nature. Assuming these types of positions mandates a certain degree of confidence in mathematics and science. Students whose lack of academic success is limiting their career choices must become aware of resources that can assist them with academic preparation and success. Not only must they become aware of these resources early on at their respective community colleges, they must also utilize these services and engage in academic

behavior that would increase their confidence in areas which may limit their career options, i.e., science and mathematics.

### Community College Transfer Students

Along with implications and recommendations offered to community college students to engage in opportunities to enhance career success at their two-year institutions, recommendations are also made for these students once they transfer to four-year institutions. The first recommendation suggests that students become involved in major and career related organizations. The findings in this study suggest that career decision-making self-efficacy is enhanced through participation in various organizations. Consistent with prior research on student involvement, it is advantageous for students to seek out these opportunities. Most academic programs offer clubs and organizations in which students can get involved that are specific to a particular field of study. These organizations often have connections with alumni and other persons within the career field with whom students can network and gain additional insight into their career choices beyond the classroom. Involvement in these types of organizations also allows students to build relationships with peers of similar interests. Participants in the study agreed that building relationships with peers of similar interest was beneficial in not only assisting in their transition to the university but also in gaining knowledge about possible career paths.

It is also recommended that students take the initiative to seek out student support offices and departments that can aid in their success at the university. As findings in this

study indicated, the transition to the university from the community college can be challenging. A number of the participants mentioned feeling alone and not knowing where to turn for help. It is possible that these feelings of isolation, along with struggles to adjust to a new environment, may lead to student attrition. The retention of minority students, in particular men of color, has become a concern for many institutions of higher education. As such, many institutions have taken it upon themselves to dedicate services and offices to assist these students. At the University of Central Florida, several offices and programs have the mission of assisting students of color with their matriculation and adjustment at the university. The offices of Transfer and Transition Services, Sophomore and Second Year Center, Multicultural Academic Student Support, Multicultural Student Center, Office of Diversity Initiatives, Brother-to-Brother Leadership program, and the Legacy Mentoring program each have missions of assisting diverse student populations. Each of these resources spends a significant amount of energy marketing and reaching out to students. However transfer students at the university must make an effort to seek out and utilize these services.

#### Student Affairs Professionals

Along with suggesting recommendations for students, this study also sought to develop recommendations for the student affairs professionals who are in positions to assist these students. Regardless of title, every student affairs professional has an ethical obligation to work toward increasing opportunities for student success. Of all the student affairs professionals, career counselors and other career services practitioners have

unique opportunities to work with students in their quest to choose a career and prepare themselves for eventual success in their chosen field. According to five of the nine participants in the study, meeting with counselors and advisors was one of the most significant influences in their gaining knowledge in reference to transferring and adjusting at the senior institution. These students indicated that meeting practitioners at both types of institutions increased their career decision-making self-efficacy. However, students also noted that due to hectic schedules, they had delayed meeting with career professionals until their last semester at the community college or university. As such, it may be necessary for career practitioners to reach out to students instead of waiting for students to come to them. Strategies to accomplish this could include creating kiosk-type environments across the college campus, particularly in places where students tend to congregate. Practitioners would also be wise to focus some of their marketing efforts on targeting specific populations such as African-American male transfer students.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, I initially found some difficulty getting in-depth information from the participants. It is possible that others practitioners may face similar situations when working with these students. As such, engaging in intrusive advising sessions may prove beneficial as well. This type of advising seeks to get at the heart of what is going on with the student and asks that the student takes some responsibility for finding solutions to complicated situations. Many of the participants in the study also had very specific thoughts regarding gender and its relationship to career choices. Designing and facilitating programs dealing with gender specific issues would be yet another strategy that practitioners could utilize to engage this population.

Decreasing budgets have become a “given” in many institutions of higher education across the country. With the decline in resources has come the need not only to adapt to smaller budgets but to continue to effectively address student needs. Practitioners should consider ways in which they can expand their collaborative efforts with other university offices and departments who also seek to address the concerns of this population. Collaborative relationships with offices such as the Multicultural Student Center are natural and likely already exist to some extent. It would be wise, however, to strengthen connections with practitioners who have access to unique populations in academic departments and other university resources such as the Recreation and Wellness Center. Not only can practitioners expand their networks with other professionals and reach a broader audience, but they can also participate in cost sharing when designing programs.

Although not a majority, a number of participants in the study referred to parents and family members for advice with career related questions. Family is often an important source of support for African-American males; and whether logical or not, many students often heeded the career advice of family members. Of the nine participants in the study, the parents of five had high school education or less. However, these parents strongly encouraged their sons to attend college and seek degrees that would increase opportunities for financial success. Although with good intentions, many parents encourage their children to pursue career goals that may or may not be in the best interest of the child. This presents a unique opportunity for practitioners to assist these students by educating their parents. Many institutions currently incorporate parent

sessions into their orientation programs. It is hopeful that career services practitioners are participating in these sessions and making parents aware of the services their students can take advantage of. In these sessions, it would be wise to suggest to parents to have their children complete some assessment activity to identify congruent career choices. As this is a time of increased utilization of social media, and in an effort to keep parents abreast of developments in the office, it may also prove wise to identify tools that they are using. At the University of Central Florida, a website and a journal are dedicated to making parents aware of the resources available to their students.

#### Student Affairs Administrators

Administrators play a key role in the education of all students, in particular African-American male transfer students. Kimbrough and Salomone (1993) remarked that often times career counseling practices are not applicable to African-Americans, as many are developed based on the values and psychological orientations of the majority population. Administrators who have the ability to influence policy and practice can change this unfortunate reality. It is necessary that administrators keep the needs of this population in mind when developing new initiatives. The UCF Direct Connect program is one such initiative that has had tremendous impact on the ability of African-American male students to transfer to the university.

In this study, a number of the participants mentioned the importance of having smooth processes in regards to transitioning from one institution to another. Much of the ease these students experienced occurred from their being involved in the Direct Connect

program. Many states, including Florida have 2+2 programs that assist students with admission to senior institutions upon completion of two-year degrees. However, Direct Connect, which guarantees admission to transfer students from four local community colleges, assists students immediately upon their community college enrollment. This allows opportunity for increased student success and matriculation.

According to many of the participants in the study, the program is working. However, each of the nine participants admitted being undecided as community college students, and they believed that their two-year institutions focused on graduating and transferring students to the senior institution with little emphasis on career development. According to Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), one's perception of an experience is just as influential as the reality of the situation. This realization presents a great opportunity for program administrators responsible for or considering adopting articulation models similar to DirectConnect. As the program administrators have the power to restructure the program, amending the program policy to incorporate a career development action plan may prove beneficial. This plan could incorporate the use of career assessments, provide opportunities for students to engage in practical experiences related to career goals as well as provide students with some guidelines for progression. Each of these activities would prove to enhance students' career decision-making process.

Lastly, although only a few students mentioned the importance of establishing relationships with faculty, these relationships had significant influence on the knowledge these students gained in reference to their career choice. Unfortunately, often times the



academy, student services, and academic units tend to operate in silos. This is unfortunate as these structures work directly with students and yield significant influence. This presents yet another opportunity for student services administrators. Earlier in this chapter, it was recommended that student affairs professionals increase their collaboration with other units with similar missions. Similarly, it is a recommendation of this study that student affairs administrators provide leadership in providing collaborative opportunities with academic units and faculty as well. Again, these opportunities can come in several forms. Something as simple as introducing visits from Career Services personnel into classrooms or something as comprehensive as working together to create a class that focuses on career development could lead to enhanced career decision-making self-efficacy for students.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

The topic of career decision-making efforts of African-American male students does not appear to be one of interest to many researchers. This is unfortunate because it has been recognized that the career development needs of African-Americans deserve urgent attention (Bingham & Ward, 2001; Brown, 1995; Brown & Pinterits, 2001; Falconer & Hays, 2006). Although research on the career development of African-Americans has been slowly building, researchers have noted the paucity of literature on the topic. Research devoted specifically to African-American males who begin their academic pursuits at two-year institutions with the hope of transferring to four-year institutions to obtain baccalaureate degrees and the literature is even sparser.

This study sought to examine those experiences of African-American male transfer students as they transition to the university in search of career success. Although the research provided great insight into the experiences of these students, there were some limitations. As with most qualitative research, the focus was on the experiences of a few subjects versus many. Therefore, the results of this study are not to be generalized. As such, future researchers on this topic may consider adopting a number of variables that influence the career decision-self-efficacy of this population and conducting quantitative research. The results would allow for information that would be more generalizable to a larger number of students.

As this research took a “snapshot” of where students were currently in regard to their major/career planning, including their previous experiences, it would be interesting for future researchers to examine this population over a period of time. As career decision-making is a developmental process, it would be useful to investigate changes in the career decision-making behavior of this population over time. It is also apparent that instances of racism and discrimination have the unfortunate ability to hamper the career success of African-American men. The participants in this study were eager to obtain their baccalaureate degrees and enter the world of work as professionals. It would be interesting to determine how African-American males with baccalaureate degrees fare in the future under different economic times and societal conditions.

### Concluding Comments on Academia and Intellectual Matters

The findings of this research add to the much needed literature regarding the career decision-making behavior of African-American male students. This study was conducted to explore the experiences of African-American males, who often appear to be an endangered species among institutions of higher education, and to investigate the experiences of this population as transfer students. As the numbers of African-American male college students continue to decrease at an alarming rate and states continue to depend on community colleges to educate their citizens, there is a clear need to continue research in this area. Further examination of the data received from the Office of Institutional Research indicates that the number of African-American male transfer students with Associate degrees who entered the university in the last few years versus the number of these students who still remain at the university is problematic. The findings suggest that graduation completion rates may be an issue for these students. Additional research on these topics would benefit academia in its quest to increase student retention and create and maintain environments of success for all students.

As this research was qualitative and explores the experiences of a limited number of students, it is unrealistic to think that information gleaned from this study can be applied to a massive number of students. However, the findings offer some much needed insight into the needs of a particular group of students. Consistent with much of the literature on the career decision-making behavior of 21<sup>st</sup> century college students, the African-American male transfer students in this study have chosen majors that may grant them the opportunity to pursue careers in more lucrative industries such as business and

allied health. Their choices indicate a shift in behavior not revealed in prior research regarding the career choices of African-American students who have been reported to pursue careers that have been deemed as “traditional” for this population.

In reflecting on the methods used to conduct this research study, I would recommend a change in regard to the second research question regarding the transfer process and its influence on major/career development. Given the limited response from participants to this question, I would have created more sub-questions to allow for expanded responses. I would also have liked to explore participants’ feelings regarding race and its influence on their career decision-making process. As the subject of race and its influence on the status of African-American males continues to ignite controversial debates, it would be interesting to gather more insight into this population’s feelings about this issue.

#### Giving Voice to My Own Reflections

Without a doubt, this has been the most challenging and often lonely undertaking of my life. While completing my Master’s degree, I remember one of my faculty members, Dr. Martha Wisbey, telling a group of students that obtaining the doctorate was the most difficult task she had ever completed. She made pursuing the doctoral degree sound both horrific and rewarding. Although not 100% certain that I would pursue further education in Counseling Psychology or Higher Education Administration, I knew I would eventually return to the classroom. And what a return it was! After four years of

evening and weekend classes, sleepless nights, and restless days, I can finally concur with Dr. Wisbey.

As I reflect on the results of this study, I must admit that I feel a great sense of accomplishment. The results of this research study will not solve the issues related to the decreasing number of African-American male students in American colleges and universities. However, the study has resulted in additional insight into the experiences and thought processes of these students as they pursue their career goals, as well as offers suggestions into how to better assist these students. As a former African-American male transfer student, I encountered experiences not unlike those shared by many of the participants in this study. I found myself confused and undecided about my career path on several occasions, found the transfer process somewhat difficult, and lost a number of credits in my transition from my community college to the university. Though I was not at all successful academically in my first semester at the university, I never once considered leaving. Being surrounded by successful peers and my desire to find career success motivated me to continue. I was also very fortunate to meet Dr. Al Smith in the Counseling Center who helped to explain career options to me based on the types of goals I wanted to pursue. Similar to many of the participants in the study, meeting with a knowledgeable counselor had a positive impact on my ability to reach my career goals.

As a practitioner and budding administrator, this process has enabled me to examine the current practices and policies that have been established to assist this population of students with a more discerning eye. Although programs are in place to assist African-American male transfer students, enhancements could be made to better

assist this population. Along with becoming more aware of the experiences that influence the career decision-making self-efficacy of this population, I also became more cognizant of the notion of race and how its influence may be perceived by some African-American male students. I have heard some say that with the election of an African-American president, President Barack Obama, the American way of life has progressed to a “post-racial” society. In analyzing the interview data from this research, it appeared that some of the participants in this study may agree with this notion. However, according to the statistics and literature on the status of African-American male students in our society, I beg to differ. As a practitioner and administrator, I feel that it is my responsibility to continue to educate these students on the reality that may confront them as they pursue career success. With the completion of this dissertation, I will have achieved a status that very few African-American males in our country ever achieve. I still ponder my future and the challenges that I will face. However, I am hopeful that the same motivation that carried me from Pitt Community College, to East Carolina University, to The University of Georgia, and finally to the University of Central Florida will continue to inspire me to achieve success in my future endeavors and positively influence as many of those that will allow me along the way.

APPENDIX A  
PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE FIGURES AND TABLES

**From:** The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education [mailto:info@jbhe.com]  
**Sent:** Friday, September 30, 2011 9:33 AM  
**To:** Lavious Daniels  
**Subject:** Use of Tables

You have our permission. Good luck with your dissertation.

Robert Bruce Slater  
Managing Editor  
Journal of Blacks in Higher Education

On Sep 30, 2011, at 9:24 AM, Lavious Daniels wrote:

Hello Mr. Slater,

With your permission, I will be using two figures from the article titled "The Alarming Decline in the Academic Performance of African-American men" written by Theodore Cross and Robert Slater in my dissertation titled "Career Decision-Making Patterns of Undecided African-American Male Transfer Students: A Qualitative Approach". The figures I will be using are the "Percentages of all African-American Enrollments that were Black Men" on page 82 and "Blacks Holding a Bachelor's Degree or Higher, March 1998" on page 84. If you could respond via this email message that it is ok, my graduate school and I would be very appreciative. Thanks again for your time and this insightful article on the academic status of African-American men.

L. Felix Daniels  
Assistant Director, Career Services  
P.O. Box 160165  
Orlando, FL 32816  
(407) 823-3317  
Lavious.daniels@ucf.edu



**From:** Noreen Savelle[mailto:noreensavelle@yahoo.com]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 27, 2011 9:50 PM  
**To:** Lavirus Daniels  
**Subject:** Re: Permission to use Table

Felix,

We are in the process of closing the office and I think I neglected to respond to your request to use the National Center material in your dissertation. What follows is the permission that the National Center gives regarding use of our material.

**Permission to Reprint**

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education grants permission to use any materials copyrighted by the National Center with full attribution as long as the content is unaltered from its original form.

Best regards, Noreen Savelle  
Executive Assistant

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From: Lavirus Daniels <Lavirus.Daniels@ucf.edu>  
To: "Noreensavelle@yahoo.com" <Noreensavelle@yahoo.com>  
Cc: Rosa Cintron Delgado <Rosa.CintronDelgado@ucf.edu>  
Sent: Friday, July 22, 2011 11:29 AM  
Subject: Permission to use Table  
Hello Noreen,

This is Felix Daniels, the doctoral candidate at the University of Central Florida. We spoke briefly today about the possibility of me getting permission to use one of the tables printed recently in the June 2011 Policy Alert to help support my dissertation topic. Although you granted me permission via the telephone, I wanted to make sure that I had our conversation (and your permission) documented. I truly appreciate your assistance and am looking forward to hearing from you. Enjoy your day!

L. Felix Daniels  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of Central Florida  
Higher Education & Policy Studies Program

APPENDIX B  
COMMUNICATION WITH PARTICIPANTS

## Sample E-Mail Communication

Dear UCF Student:

Do you identify as an African-American male? Are you 18 years of age or older? Did you transfer to the University of Central Florida from a two-year institution? Have you ever been undecided about your career choice? If you can answer yes to each of these questions, I am in need of your help.

I am currently conducting a research study regarding the career decision-making process of African-American male transfer students. The best way we have of learning about our students is by asking students similar to you to share their thoughts and opinions regarding their experiences.

You are being invited to participate in an interview with me. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will take place in the Career Services office. Your participation is voluntary. If you consent to participation, you do not have to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable and can withdraw at any time.

At the conclusion of the interview, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts for clarity. You will also receive a \$10.00 Best Buy gift card, as well as an opportunity to meet with me to further discuss your career goals and establish a career action plan if you have not done so.

Please respond to this email and let me know if you are interested in participating. You can also feel free to call me at (407) 823-3317 and I can answer any questions you may have. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

L. Felix Daniels  
Doctoral Candidate

## Sample Follow-Up Email Communication

Dear UCF Student:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study regarding the career decision-making behavior of undecided African-American male transfer students? The insight you share regarding your experiences is sure to provide information that will assist the African-American male transfer student population in the future.

Your interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will take place in my office located in room 109 in the Career Services building. Your interview will be held at \_\_\_\_\_ a.m./p.m. on (date). Upon your arrival, we will spend 10 to 15 minutes discussing the purpose of the study, the interview protocol, and sign and complete the demographic and consent forms. Remember, your participation is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable and can withdraw at any time.

At the conclusion of the interview, you will also receive a \$10.00 Best Buy gift card. Once the data from the interview is transcribed, you will have an opportunity to review it for clarification. You will also have an opportunity to meet with me to further discuss your career goals and establish a career action plan if you have not done so.

Thanks again for volunteering to participate in this study. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me via this email address or call me at (407) 823-3317. I am looking forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

L. Felix Daniels  
Doctoral Candidate



### ***Summary Explanation for Exempt Research***

#### **EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH**

Title of Project: Career Decision-Making Patterns of Undecided African-American Male Transfer Students: A Qualitative Approach

Principal Investigator: Lavious Felix Daniels

Other Investigators:

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Rosa Cintrón

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

The purpose of this research is to examine those experiences that may serve to enhance or impede the career decision-making process of undecided African-American male transfer students.

The participants will be asked to participate in a 60 to 90 minute interview with the principal investigator. The interview will be audio recorded and will take place in the UCF Career Services office.

The interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and the participant will be asked to commit to that time frame. However if the participant feels uncomfortable with the questioning at any time, he will be free to not answer the question or withdraw from the interview.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints: Lavious Daniels, Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education and Policy Studies, College of Education, 407-823-3317 or Dr. Rosa Cintrón, Faculty Supervisor, Department of Educational and Human Sciences at 407-823-1248 or by email at [rosa.cintrondelgado@ucf.edu](mailto:rosa.cintrondelgado@ucf.edu).

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

APPENDIX C  
PRELIMINARY AND FINAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

## PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Have you decided on a major?
  - a. If so, what experiences (positive or negative) influenced your decision?
  - b. If not, how do you plan on going about the process of selecting a major?
2. Do you feel as if your major is consistent with your values, interests, personality, and skills?
  - a. If so, please explain.
  - b. If not, why is that?
3. Describe the work environment in which you would be most comfortable?
4. Does your preferred work environment have any impact on your career choice?
5. You indicated in our initial communications that you were undecided about your major at some point. At what point was that?
  - a. How did you overcome the indecision?
6. Describe the sources (positive and/or negative) that have impacted or have the potential to impact your choice of major.
7. Describe the sources (positive and/or negative) that have impacted or have the potential to impact your career choice.
8. Has your race impacted your choice of major?
  - a. If so, please explain.
9. Has your race impacted your career choice?
  - a. If so, please explain.
10. Has your gender impacted your choice of major?
  - a. If so, please explain.
11. Has your gender impacted your career choice?
  - a. If so, please explain.



12. Has your academic ability impacted your choice of major?
  - a. If so, please explain.
13. Has your academic ability impacted your career choice?
  - a. If so, please explain.
14. Has your socio-economic status impacted your choice of major?
  - a. If so, please explain.
15. Has your socio-economic status impacted your career choice?
  - a. If so, please explain.
16. Do you feel as if your career choice is consistent with your values, interests, personality, and skills?
  - a. If so, please explain.
17. Are you aware of the current economic crisis?
  - a. If so, has it impacted your career choice?
18. Describe the experiences that have aided in increasing your confidence about your career choice.
19. What were your career goals when you began college at your previous two-year institution?
  - a. How long were you at your previous institution?
20. Do you feel as if your previous institution assisted you in achieving your career goals?
  - a. If so, how?
  - b. If not, please explain.
21. Do you feel as if your current (four year) institution has assistend you in achieving your career goals?
  - a. If so, how?
  - b. If not, please explain.
22. Describe the experiences that increased your knowledge of the transfer process.

23. Did you switch majors after transferring to the four-year institution?
  - a. If so, what prompted the change?
24. What resources do you utilize when you have questions/concerns about your career choice?
25. Have you ever used Career Services at either of the institutions you have attended?
  - a. If so, what was your perception of the services offered and do you feel as if your visit as beneficial?

## FINAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Introduction to Participant:** Hello and thanks for taking the time to participate in this study. The insight that you will share regarding your career decision-making experiences as a transfer student is sure to provide valuable information. It is the hope of this study this information will be utilized to inform policies and procedures in higher education regarding African-American male transfer students.

**Explanation of Research to Participant:** Unfortunately, the number of African-American males attending college is declining. According to research, the majority of African-American males begin their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree at two-year institutions. However, students encounter a number of challenges in the transfer process including the inability to choose a major leading to a desired career choice. The ability to make an informed decision regarding one's major is an important step in the career decision-making process. As such, it is important to gain information regarding the career decision-making process of African-American male transfer students that will assist in their retention and success. Throughout the interview, you will hear the terms "major" and "career choice" used considerably. Please keep in mind that the term "major" refers to your desired course of study at the university. The term "career choice" refers to the occupation you have chosen based on your own self-appraisal (likes and dislikes) and research on various occupations and majors. Based on your consent, you have met the selection criteria for this study and agree to participate in an interview with me. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. During the interview, I will be asking you a series of 24 questions. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, please feel free to stop or withdraw from the interview. After the interview, I will email you a copy of the transcript for clarity. Please review and send back to me within one week. If further clarification is needed, we can meet via phone or in person. In order to accurately reflect our conversation during the interview, I will be using an audio recorder. However to protect your confidentiality, I will not use your name in the research report or any of the material I produce. Do I have your permission to record now? Do you have any questions before we begin? If not, let us begin.

1. Have you decided on a major?
  - a. If so, what experiences (positive or negative) influenced your decision?
  - b. If not, how do you plan on going about the process of selecting a major?
2. Do you feel as if your major is consistent with whom you are as an individual?
  - a. If so, please explain.
  - b. If not, why is that?

3. Describe the work environment in which you would be most comfortable?
4. Does being in this type of work environment have any impact on your career choice?
5. You indicated in our initial communications that you were undecided about your major at some point. At what point was that?
  - a. How did you overcome the indecision?
6. Describe the sources (positive and/or negative) that have impacted or have the potential to impact your choice of major.
7. Describe the sources (positive and/or negative) that have impacted or have the potential to impact your career choice.
8. Has your race impacted your choice of major?
  - a. If so, please explain.
9. Has your race impacted your career choice?
  - a. If so, please explain.
10. Has your gender impacted your choice of major?
  - a. If so, please explain.
11. Has your gender impacted your career choice?
  - a. If so, please explain.
12. Has your academic ability impacted your choice of major?
  - a. If so, please explain.
13. Has your academic ability impacted your career choice?
  - a. If so, please explain.
14. Has your socio-economic status impacted your choice of major?
  - a. If so, please explain.
15. Has your socio-economic status impacted your career choice?
  - a. If so, please explain.

16. Are you aware of the current economic crisis?
  - a. If so, has it impacted your career choice?
17. Describe the experiences that have aided in increasing your confidence about your career choice.
18. What were your career goals when you began college at your previous two-year institution?
  - a. How long were you at your previous institution?
19. Do you feel as if your previous institution assisted you in achieving your career goals?
  - a. If so, how?
  - b. If not, please explain.
20. Do you feel as if your current (four year) institution has assisted you in achieving your career goals?
  - a. If so, how?
  - b. If not, please explain.
21. Describe the experiences that increased your knowledge of the transfer process.
22. Did you switch majors after transferring to the four-year institution?
  - a. If so, what prompted the change?
23. What resources do you utilize when you have questions/concerns about your career choice?
24. Have you ever used Career Services at either of the institutions you have attended?
  - a. If so, what was your perception of the services offered and do you feel as if your visit as beneficial?

APPENDIX D  
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

### Demographic Information Form

Please complete the following demographic information form. Please know that your responses will be kept confidential.

1. Gender:      Male      Female      Other
  
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Race: \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What year did you enroll in University of Central Florida? \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. What is your current major? \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. What is your current status? \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. Did you transfer from a two-year institution?      Yes   No
  - a. If so, what was the name of your previous institution?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
  - b. At what point did you transfer?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
8. What was your high school GPA on a 4.0 scale? \_\_\_\_\_
  
9. What was your transfer GPA on a 4.0 scale? \_\_\_\_\_
  
10. What is your current GPA on a 4.0 scale? \_\_\_\_\_
  
11. What was the predominant racial makeup of your neighborhood?  
 African-American    White    Hispanic    Asian    Equally Diverse
  
12. What was the predominant racial makeup of your high school?  
 African-American    White    Hispanic    Asian    Equally Diverse
  
13. What is the highest grade level completed by either of your parents? \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX E  
TRANSCRIPTIONIST'S STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY



### **Transcriptionist's Statement of Confidentiality**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to all audio recordings and documentation received from Lavious Felix Daniels related to his doctoral study on the Career Decision-Making Patterns of Undecided African-American Male Transfer students. I also agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-recorded interviews.
2. To not make copies of any audio recordings of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Lavious Felix Daniels.
3. To store all study-related audio recordings and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
4. To return all audio recordings and hard copies of transcripts to Lavious Felix Daniels in a timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing audio recordings and transcripts from my computer and any backup devices.

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
Transcriptionist Signature/Date

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator Signature/Date

APPENDIX F  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2501 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**  
**FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Lavious Daniels**

Date: **November 23, 2011**

Dear Researcher:

On 11/23/2011, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	Career Decision-Making Patterns of Undecided African-American Male Transfer Students: A Qualitative Approach
Investigator:	Lavious Daniels
IRB Number:	SBB-11-08028
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in IRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewska, Ph.D., J.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 11/23/2011 12:52:27 PM EST

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX G  
OBSERVATIONAL FIELD NOTES

## Observational Field Notes

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

### Things to Consider:

- Who is present?
- What is happening? What is participant doing?  
Saying? Behaving?
- What activity occurring? Why is it occurring?

Personal Observations:

Non-Verbal Behavior:

My Thoughts/Impressions:

Other:

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